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YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

VOL. I.

YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

A NOVEL.

BY

DUTTON COOK,

Author of "Hobson's Choice," "Over Head and Ears," "Paul Foster's Daughter," etc.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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Inscribed
to
Linda.

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YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

CHAPTER I.

BY WAY OF PROLOGUE.

ABOVE and on either side the chancel arch of our village church—an edifice of exceeding antiquity—certain decorations in fresco had been long, long ago ruthlessly smeared over and shrouded with whitewash. The churchwardens of that period, it seemed, had pronounced against ecclesiastical art as a vain, idolatrous, and altogether abominable pursuit. Time, however, had fought upon the side of the fresco. Its veil had been rent in many places; had peeled off in flakes or fallen in clouds, shedding a sort of hair-powder, gratuitously, upon the congregated heads below; something of the original work could certainly be discerned. No distinct or coherent design, perhaps; but here were

patches of clouded crimson or dull blue; there gleams as of dead gold leaf; in sundry places, suspicions of shape and outline, with surely now and then spectral faces, indistinct of feature and vacant of expression, peering through the haze, and struggling to assert their existence. The fresco still survived, if, like a paralytic, with limited force and deficient faculties. To wandering eyes or flagging attention during sermon time, or the less interesting incidents of our village service—which had indisputably its moments of irksomeness—the picture was an irresistible object of contemplation. I am only narrating of myself; then a child of tender years, prisoned in a high pew and encompassed with hard hassocks, plucked at or pushed by admonitory hands whenever excess of restlessness afflicted me, or my mental vagrancy became too obvious an outrage upon decorum; but I am sure I may also speak on behalf of others. That nebulous fresco in its own dim way, if given power of discourse, would have much to say as to the gapings and blinkings, the staring and studying it has provoked among generations of remiss and drowsy worshippers. And our maltreated mural painting had this merit about it: the more one looked at it, the more one perceived in it, or thought one per-

ceived in it. The cruel coat of whitewash it had been constrained to wear was in this respect a positive gain. Fancy came eagerly in aid of its short-comings. Our thoughts pieced out its imperfections. There were moments—sometimes during the service, but more often in the course of the sermon—when the whole design seemed clearly disclosed to me. The whitewash was altogether gone. The colours were bright and fresh, the drawing manifest, and the artist's intention, in all its integrity, patent and demonstrated beyond all gainsaying. Heaven had opened; and in a flood of light and a glory of prismatic hues, saints and martyrs in holy congress, and benign angels in resplendent groups, stood forth fully revealed. A moment, and then—upon the nudge of a warning elbow, or the lunge of a sharp-rimmed prayer-book, administered by reproofing authority—the vision vanished. All was as before, only less intelligible. Fancy had been deposed and driven away; the whitewash was again supreme. The task of interpreting the fresco had to be undertaken entirely anew.

The little boy, whose early churchgoing was thus faulty and reprehensible, Time has thrust far from me into the distant past. Years and years

have sundered us and changed us so that our identification is now as a thing almost incredible. To me that child now appears not myself but another; his character and conduct matters in which I have no concern. At least, I feel myself at liberty to discuss, and, if need be, condemn them in the plainest terms. It may be, however, that our disunion is less absolute than it seems to be, or than I am myself fully conscious of. Age appears alien to its own youth; dissimilar and distinct in aspect as in every other way. Yet the time when the twain parted company, when the child ceased and the man began, is so hard to fix, that doubt upon the question becomes unavoidable. Some subtle imperceptible filaments linking them together may ever remain: a leaven of the child affecting the man, or some embryonic element of age possessing influence even in extreme youth.

At least, if I resemble in nothing else the boy studying the whitewashed fresco, I am like him in that I am now studying, with much of his desire, to comprehend and interpret a large, confused, and partially lost or hidden picture. I mean the Past. I desire to render it intelligible if I can, and to relate concerning it. Just now all seems vague and vast, remote and incoherent. The sun may

presently break forth, however, and abate, if not wholly dispel, the obscurity. Or, possibly, fancy may assist me when fact falls short. It is indispensable, indeed, in such a case, that conjecture should now and then be permitted, when more worthy evidence is not forthcoming. In a story, or what purports to be a story, it is not to be supposed that all the witnesses are upon oath, or that all the circumstances stated are capable of being formally and legally proved.

So much by way of prologue.

CHAPTER II.

“CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME.”

I WAS Childe Roland, and Overbury Hall was my Dark Tower.

Not that I was a very knightly person : a slim, swarthy, undersized boy of some ten or twelve years, perhaps. Not that it was a particularly romantic-looking place : a stiff, square, stone building, with sham battlements and numberless windows, of the Manchester warehouse or county infirmary order of architecture, built in George the Third's reign, after the total destruction by fire of the old hall—a real hall, which Inigo Jones had designed. But I was of the age and the humour to be fascinated by it ; and, accordingly, it fascinated me.

A child with a lively faith in fays, giants, enchanted castles, and other of the established possessions of fable, readily finds stimulants to his

belief, easily feeds his appetite for the mystic and marvellous. He is in his own eyes a knight-errant, his hazel switch a falchion, his infantile attire a suit of burnished mail; deeds of chivalric prowess are to him matters of most easy accomplishment. Fiercely lashing a bed of stinging nettles, he believes himself the vanquisher of a mighty Paynim host. He invents his adventures, and counts himself a hero on the score of supposititious achievements. Perhaps it is not children only who do this, however.

And there was something to be said for Overbury Hall. Its existence was a sort of secret. Though you climbed the highest eminence of the neighbourhood—Beacon Mount for instance—you could catch no glimpse of the hall, not even of its chimney-tops. But if you stole up a very dark twisting avenue; the moss on the roadway deadening the sound of your footfalls; the crowded gnarled boughs above stooping down to knock your cap off, or pluck you by the hair; the shrubberies whispering wickedly together as you passed, taunting, threatening you, hissing out your name even; if you had nerve to accomplish thus much, you came suddenly upon the great house as though by magic. It barred your progress and

confronted you in the most massive and imposing fashion. Though you had sallied forth on purpose to find it, and would have gone home disappointed if you had failed in your quest, it was quite a shock when you did find it, even though you had come upon it in the same way a score of times before.

It not only lay in the hollow of the park, enshrouded and buried by huge and thickly-congregated trees; but it was also dead, stone dead. Its eyes—by which I mean its windows—were fast closed and boarded up. No breath of life, in the shape of smoke, ever issued from its chimneys. Birds built their nests in every nook of its façade; rabbits frisked about its front door-steps, as though they were dancing on its grave-stone. Lord Overbury had long been absent from England. His estates, heavily encumbered, were said to be vested in trustees for the benefit of his creditors. Meantime, the hall was tenantless. It was certainly a most corpse-like place, mouldy and mildewed, with thick green slime upon its walls and an odorous atmosphere about it as from a newly opened sepulchre. A lake washed one side of it: a standing pool, black and sedgy, that never seemed to catch glimpses of blue sky or reflections of

heaven's light. Sombre trees bent over it as though meditating suicide, and beneath, in the dark shadows of their boughs, reptiles croaked and water-rats plunged, and wild fowl, rustling among the rushes, uttered strange cries of warning or of suffering, awful to listen to.

Nominally, the hall was under the charge of old Thacker, a superannuated gardener, and his wife, who received a small stipend, just sufficient to keep them out of the poor-house, in return for the services they rendered, or were supposed to render. They lived in one of the park lodges, a quarter of a mile or so from the great house. I don't think they often went any nearer to it, or indeed troubled themselves at all about it. Mrs. Thacker was always busy, either in boiling cabbages, or in hanging out ragged clothes to dry upon the tumble-down palings of the park. Old Thacker, when he wasn't staring at his pig—his "peg," he called it—was invariably hurrying to or from the Barley Mow public-house, "up street," Purrington. I should have said that he was either hurrying thither, or loitering back; in the latter case, his nose, which was of a bulbous pattern, was usually very red, and the flavour of strong liquors much affected his exhalations.

Apart from the fascinations I have described, Overbury Hall had other charms for me. I had clearly no business within its boundaries, and it was situate at a distance of some three miles from my home. In visiting it, therefore, a journey and the commission of a trespass were involved; enhancing the attractive venturesomeness of approaching the Dark Tower at all.

One morning I had stolen unharmed up the mysterious avenue and found myself close upon the great building; it lay across my path like a recumbent giant of granite. All was still, save that the leaves were muttering as ever, clouds of rooks were sailing away overhead, cawing discordantly as they darkened the sky, and some wild creature my steps had disturbed was making its way with a furtive rustle through the long rank grass; otherwise, all seemed as usual. I was quite alone, and the Dark Tower was within a few paces of me.

Suddenly I perceived a certain change in the aspect of the dead hall. It was not much, yet it was something; and, under all the circumstances of the case, something remarkable, decidedly. One of the many eyes of the corpse had opened! From a window on the ground floor the shutters had been removed. It was black, whereas all the others were

white, or whity-brown. Clearly, in my character of Childe Roland, I was bound to see what this change portended.

I was, as I have said, of low stature, and the window was some few feet from the ground. Still, it was easy, by mounting on the projecting ridge of rusticated stone that marked the base of the house, and grasping the window-sill, to draw myself up to the desired elevation. A pause, perhaps of longer duration than was quite worthy of a valiant knight-errant, for reflection and the summoning of sufficient breath and nerve, and then—I had climbed to the window and was looking in.

For some moments, flattening my nose against the cold glass, I could distinguish nothing but the reflection of my own face, and even that was not very clear. Stay, was it my own face, I asked myself? Surely it was larger, redder, older, fatter. I hadn't such staring black, blood-shot eyes, so spongy-looking a nose, such a grinning mouth. If I was looking in, some other person was looking out, and but a window pane hindered the absolute contact of our features!

Then came a shout and a burst of noisy laughter. The window was flung up, and before I had time to descend and escape, I found myself seized by the



collar of my jacket and drawn headlong into one of the lower rooms of Overbury Hall. I was roughly treated, but I was not hurt. A strong pair of arms held me aloft swinging in the air for a few seconds, and then I was dropped on the floor. I came down on my feet with a sound of hob-nailed boots clattering on bare boards. I staggered a little, but I didn't fall.

"Don't be frightened," said a hoarse rough voice.

"I'm not frightened." It was not strictly true; but of course a Childe Roland could not confess to the sensation of fear.

Then the air of the room seemed full of laughter again; of laughter and tobacco smoke. I began to laugh myself and to cough, for the smoke was dense and pungent.

I was a child; but I knew that mirth was a sort of guarantee of safety, or at any rate of immunity from punishment.

CHAPTER III.

MY ADVENTURE.

THE room was small, and barely furnished. A fire burnt in the grate, and on the hob a little brass kettle was steaming. A bottle and a tumbler stood on the table, and soon I perceived that, in addition to the tobacco smoke, the fragrance of hot rum-and-water pervaded the air of the chamber.

I found myself in the presence of a man, rather untidily than shabbily dressed. He wore a swallow-tailed, claret-coloured coat, with basket buttons, a figured blue satin waistcoat, and drab trousers buttoned at the ankle. His frilled shirt was fastened by a brooch, and a white cravat was loosely twisted round his neck. But he had the tumbled appearance of a man who had slept in his clothes. He wore rings upon his fingers, but his hands were so dingy and hairy that they looked like the paws of some wild animal. His wristbands

were creased and soiled into a pattern of dirty circles.

As to his face, I could only think of it in relation to an old engraving I knew of, hanging in one of the attics at home, and representing a satyr bending over the sleeping form of a nymph.

The man had just the look of that satyr; the protruding lower jaw, the thick lips, the broad, crooked, depressed nose, the low corrugated forehead, the strong lines running from the nostrils towards the corners of the mouth; there were even tufts of hair that stood erect upon his temples, and did duty for horns. I could not help glancing towards his lower limbs, half expecting to find him possessed of the crooked legs of his kind. It was with some disappointment that my eyes lighted upon his drab trousers. I consoled myself with reflecting that they might nevertheless encase goat-like legs.

"Where do you come from?" he demanded, closing one of his eyes, as though he could in that way see me better; I was so small. But the action imparted a most satyr-like expression of winking to his face. His bristling eyebrows lowered, but his mouth was still laughing.

"From the Down Farm," I answered.

"The Down Farm? Out beyond Purrington? Why, that's Hugh Orme's land, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And he farms that water meadow in the valley, don't he? and the arable and pasture stretching out beyond towards the Steepleborough road? To be sure he does. I remember now. Are you his son?"

"No, he's my uncle."

"Your uncle, eh? And so you come here bird's-nesting, or snaring rabbits, or what not?"

"I didn't mean to do any harm," I said, not quite in a Childe Roland tone.

"Well, I don't know that there's much harm done," he observed, with a gruff laugh.

"Here, have a drink." He held out a steaming tumbler to me. I tasted its contents.

"Do you like it?"

"Not much," I answered, coughing. "It's too fiery." Then fearing lest I had given offence by my frankness of speech, I added, "I dare say I should like it better if I was bigger."

He laughed very much at this, and I laughed too with a vague notion that my remark was more funny or clever than it really seemed to me to be. And then I thought the satyr's laughing a good

sign, and that it behoved me as much as possible to encourage his mirth.

"You're quite a young shaver," he said, presently. "Take a pinch of snuff." And he held out a large gold box to me.

I took a pinch, terribly afraid, however, that he designed to snap the lid suddenly, and catch my fingers. But he didn't do that. Of course I sneezed very much. And the more I sneezed the more the satyr seemed amused.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Duke," I said.

I had been christened Marmaduke, but from a general feeling that it was inconveniently lengthy for the ordinary purposes of life, the name had been cut down to one syllable. "Duke" had about it a certain savour of the peerage, and, therefore, in my position, of false pretence, which was distasteful to me. Still I preferred it to Marmaduke, which had entailed upon me various disadvantages, including personal conflicts with such of the village boys as thought it humorous to accost me as "Marmalade"—a liberty I had felt bound to resent. Painful results, in the way of a bruised face and abraded knuckles, had ensued; but I endured them patiently enough, and even with a sort of pleasure,

as evidences of my valour and victory. I must own that my correction of my satirists and contemners would have been less complete if our head carter, Jim Truckle, had not, whip in hand, come to my aid at a critical moment of the proceedings.

"Duke, eh?" repeated the satyr. "A recent creation, evidently."

I knew beforehand that he would make a joke about it. Everybody did. But I could not join in his laugh this time. I felt that it was too much at my expense. And to tell the truth I did not clearly comprehend his joke.

"But Duke what?" he asked presently. "You're Duke of Something or Somebody, I suppose?"

"Duke Nightingale," I said.

"Nightingale, eh?" and he rubbed his dirty hand across his low red forehead, with a look as though he were trying to recollect something. He did not speak again for some minutes. Then he suddenly inquired, "Mother living? At the Down Farm? Hugh Orme's sister?"

I answered all these questions in the affirmative.

"To be sure," he said; and then he grew silent and thoughtful again. "What, were you born in

these parts?" he began to question me anew, after a long pause.

"Yes," I said.

"So far as you know, I suppose you mean. Ever been to London?"

"Never."

He stared at me very hard indeed. "Nightingale!" he muttered, musingly. Then he drained his glass, and proceeded to mix himself another, pouring hot water from the little kettle on the hob. "I suppose you won't smoke a pipe with me?" he asked.

I said that if he had no objection I thought I would very much rather not.

He filled and lighted his own pipe, and soon enveloped himself in a thick cloud of smoke, through which, however, I could perceive his blood-shot, protruding, black eyes still staring at me.

"Do you go to school?" he next inquired.

"No. Mother teaches me. And Mr. Bygrave, the curate. He comes over to the farm twice a week from Purrington. I get my lessons and exercises done ready for him when he comes."

"And to-day you're playing truant?"

"No; to-day isn't one of his days."

"So, Bygrave's the curate, is he? What's become of old Gascoigne, then? Dead?"

Mr. Gascoigne was our rector. I explained that he was still living, but was now very old and infirm, and had, of late, been assisted by a curate, Mr. Bygrave. But the satyr did not seem to be listening to me. He was muttering "Nightingale!" over and over again.

Suddenly he rose, and opened a door opposite to the fireplace. It led into a large, dark, oak-panelled room. I learned afterwards that it was the library of the hall.

"Come here," said the satyr, and I followed him into the room. I could see nothing at first, but he unfastened the shutters of one of the windows, and allowed a broad shaft of dusty light to dart through the clouded panes.

There was a large, faded, ragged Turkey carpet upon the floor; a heavy carved table, with a thick nap of dust and fluff upon its surface, stood in the centre, and straggling apart from each other, as though declining all intercourse or association, appeared a few high-backed chairs covered with worn velvet of a dim green hue. I perceived no books anywhere, and the furniture seemed very scanty in proportion to the vast size of the room. I could

scarcely see to its further end, it was so distant and the light so feeble; but the whole aspect of the place was dismantled and neglected.

“Look at that,” said the satyr, and he pointed to a picture in a broad gold frame that hung above the mantelpiece of yellow marble, on the front of which was carved in bold relief the coat-of-arms, with the supporters, and legend of the house of Overbury.

The picture, clearly a portrait, represented a tall, slender gentleman, attired in robes of crimson velvet trimmed with ermine. He wore white silk stockings, and a heavy chain of gold hung round his neck; he was leaning against a richly draped table, upon which were many books and scrolls of paper, and a highly ornate inkstand, well supplied with feathery-looking pens. One white hand rested upon the table, the other—very taper as to the fingers, and these adorned with filbert-shaped nails—gathered together the folds of his robe, as though the better to exhibit the slim symmetry of his legs. He was of pale complexion, with brown hair clustering in curls low down upon his forehead. His eyes wore a bright surprised look, and his red lips were curved into a most amiable smile. Behind him there was a fluted column, with flapping curtains in some way suspended from its capital

by gilded cords and tasseis. In the extreme distance was painted a dim landscape backed by purple hills, over which lowered lurid clouds very billowy in form.

I looked at this picture for some time; it was to me an impressive work, and the gentleman it portrayed seemed somehow to have fixed his gleaming eyes upon me; as I moved his glance followed me; he even appeared to raise himself on tip-toe the better to view me. The satyr, I noticed—he had brought his smoking tumbler with him, and was holding it with both hands, as though to warm them—did not look at the picture at all; all the time I was looking at it he was looking intently at me.

“Well, what do you think of it?” he asked, at length.

“Very grand,” I said. “The most beautiful picture I ever saw.” To tell the truth I had seen very few pictures. I merely desired to convey my great and genuine admiration of the work, and I could find no other way of expressing myself.

“Do you think it’s like?”

“Like who?” I inquired, innocently.

“Why, like me,” said the satyr, with a noisy laugh.

"No," I answered, with a start; for it had never once occurred to me that the picture was meant to be a portrait of him.

"Not a bit?"

"No; not a bit."

"Why, what's wrong about it? Why isn't it like? Come, let's have your opinion."

"Well," I said with an effort—yet as he pressed me I felt compelled to speak—"I think it's too good-looking."

He roared with laughter at this, and cried again and again, "Too good-looking, eh! That's your opinion is it? Too good-looking, eh?"

I thought, perhaps, I had been candid over-much. "I don't say that you're not good-looking, you know," I observed.

"But do you think it, you young Jesuit, you? Honestly?"

"Well no, honestly, I don't." For I was brought to bay; but he only laughed. He was a wonderful satyr for laughing.

"It was meant for me, however. I sat for it. Years ago though, now; and a lot of money was paid for it. A chap up in London painted it."

He looked at me curiously as he spoke, and seemed to wait for me to answer. I simply said,

"Oh, did he!" not having any other kind of observation ready.

"But as you say, it's not a bit like, and the man that painted it was a fool." I had not said that, by-the-bye, nor anything like it. I greatly admired the picture, although not as a portrait of the satyr, certainly. "It's better looking, although it's a white-faced, sickly, simpering idiot all the same. Let's see whether a glass of hot grog will bring any colour into his face."

As he spoke he flung the contents of his tumbler at the picture. There was a smoking wet patch upon the canvas; the gentleman still smiled and looked at me, although he seemed to be shedding very hot and copious tears.

"It's improved him, by the Lord," cried the satyr. "He's so far like me, then. Real navy rum, hot, does him good. Come away, shaver; this room's enough to give one the horrors."

As I followed him out I took one parting glance at the picture. Then for the first time I saw, or thought I saw, that the gentleman's features bore some faint resemblance to the satyr's; but they were so much more refined, the face so much more smooth of surface and delicate of colour, that the likeness, I decided, could never have been a very

striking one. However, the satyr, young, and slim, and clean, if he had ever been so, might have looked something as that picture looked. Except the smile. I held it impossible that the satyr could ever have smiled like that. He could only laugh—he could never have done anything else—and exhibit to the utmost advantage his abundant supply of large, yellow, tusky-looking teeth.

“Well, shaver, you’ve seen something, and now I’m going to have a nap, and you’d better cut home. What time do you dine?”

“At two o’clock.”

“Ah, then, you’ll be late unless you run all the way. Shake hands.”

I shook hands with him. There was a chink of money about our performance of the operation. Three sovereigns were slid from his palm into mine.

“For me?” I said; “oh, thank you, sir.” I was nearly saying satyr.

“For you; and don’t spend it all in rum or tobacco, or such like. A little snuff, as you seem fond of it, I wouldn’t so much object to. But be a good boy and mind your books, and always tell the truth and try and be a comfort to your uncle and mother, and generally behave yourself properly, and do all that sort of thing. It’s so long since I’ve

said anything of that kind that I'm not quite sure of the correct text; but I'm pretty sure it comes near to what I was saying. It was gabbled over to me often enough when I was your age, and perhaps it's been gabbled over to a good many more in the same case, and I dare say a deal of good it's done the lot of us. Don't be a prig, or a sneak, or a fool, if you can help it. Learn your Church Catechism and take a few lessons in boxing, if you get a chance. They always come in handy at some time or another. Snare a few rabbits now and then if you like, or fish in the lake, only don't fall into it, because there's not many here to pull you out. And now, God bless you; cut your lucky."

Thereupon he lifted me up, and rather threw me out of the window than helped me to climb out in my own way. I alighted on my feet, however, and as I hurried down the dark avenue I could hear his loud, harsh laugh sounding after me, and echoing among the dense plantations on either side of me.

CHAPTER IV.


THE DOWN FARM.

I HURRIED home, running nearly all the way. I avoided Purrington, taking the shorter cut through the meadows, over the hatches, and so, round by the mill, on to the open down.

I was thoroughly content. I had been the hero, at last, of a real adventure. True, it had not involved that peril of life or limb which ordinarily should attend the experiences of knights errant. But something had come of my visits to the Dark Tower. I had seen a satyr.

Now that I had 'quitted him, and knew myself to be none the worse, but, indeed, somewhat the better, for having seen him, I rather regretted that he had not been a giant, or even a mysterious dwarf, addicted to strange gestures and wild speeches, his colour a bright yellow, perhaps, if

choice were permitted in that respect. Still a satyr was something. I was well inclined towards satyrs. They were not very intelligent perhaps. And I had some scorn in particular for that one of whom Æsop related, who was so angry with his guest, the traveller, for breathing on his fingers to warm them, and blowing on his porridge to cool it. A satyr who could not distinguish between those two processes must certainly have been rather stupid. But altogether satyrs, what with their delight in dangling bunches of grapes before them, in wearing wreaths of vine-leaves for raiment, in playing on their pan-pipes, and dancing and leaping in the air, the inevitable result, probably, of their being endowed with goat legs, presented many interesting characteristics. My satyr had eschewed vine-leaves, and adopted civilised costume; he had produced no grapes, but he had consumed much rum-and-water; he had not played on the pipes, although he had smoked one. Still, as things went, there was much to admire about him. He had shown me a fine picture, his snuff still set me sneezing at intervals, and he had given me three sovereigns. Such conduct might be unusual with satyrs, but otherwise it could not be said to be objection-




able. On the whole, I greatly approved my satyr.

The Down Farm, our house—I say “ours” simply because I was permitted to live in it many years, and to view it as my home—was an old red-roofed, red-faced building, that could claim little admiration on the score of its looks. It was two-storied, of irregular design, crowned with towering stacks of chimneys, and boasting a large sun-dial above its roomy, worm-eaten wooden porch. But what with drab and orange lichen patches, a partial tapestry of ivy, and a coating here and there of bright green velvet moss; to say nothing of luxuriant creepers that tried hard to conceal its harsh outlines by flourishing about their graceful arms, and proffering flowers and foliage in unexpected places; the Down Farm House had some title to be considered picturesque. It stood alone—there was no other habitation nearer than two miles—built in a hollow of Purrington Down, the shoulders of which sheltered it somewhat from the fierce and chill blasts that often swept over Steepleborough plain. A neat garden, with a smooth elastic carpet of lawn, standard rose-trees, laurel shrubberies, and trim, firm gravel paths, fronted the house. The farm-yard, stables,

out-buildings, and offices were in the rear, and these were backed by a noble old barn, its timbers a kind of dun purple in hue, with a thickly-thatched roof, grey and rusty from lapse of time and long exposure to sun and rain. Flocks of pigeons were for ever hovering about this building, holding mysterious bird-parliaments or congresses—occasionally, indeed, something very like prize-fights—in its neighbourhood, and relieving its sober tints with a pleasant freckle of dazzling white. And yellow rotund barley or wheat ricks usually flanked the farm-house, standing sentry there in a stolid and corpulent way, as though to ward off intruders and to avouch its dignity and prosperity.

The Down Farm was the property of my uncle, Hugh Orme; his own freehold, as it had been his father's, and his grandfather's before him. But his land was light in quality, and, as farms were accounted in our part of the country, of limited extent. He had secured a lease, therefore, of many adjoining acres, including certain rich water meadows on the marge of the Purr, the little river, a branch of the Rumble, which twists and glitters, like a silver chain on a lady's neck, about the dips and crevices of Steepleborough plain. He was thus both a landed proprietor and a tenant farmer upon the estate of



Lord Overbury. But inasmuch as the strength of a thing is determined by its weakest part, so his social position—a matter strictly viewed in our county—was ruled to be that of a tenant farmer. It was well understood that he was not to be classed among our landowners and gentry. This was of the less consequence, seeing that “gentlefolks” did not abound with us. Lord Overbury, the great man of our district, was, as I have already stated, an absentee. Other magnates of the county, such as the Englefields, the Templemores, and the Rockburys of Hurlstone Castle, lived miles and miles away from Purrington. Moreover, the matter was of the very slightest concern to my uncle, an unambitious man, of simple tastes and habits, leading a very homely sort of life, devoted to his farm, and rarely crossing the borders of his parish.

Hugh Orme was a bachelor. He was now perhaps between fifty and sixty, and it was presumed that he would not enter the married state. He was said to be rich, but on that head he had never spoken a word in my hearing. He was reserved, sparing of speech, and somewhat ungracious of manner, but he was much respected by the whole country-side as a right-minded neighbourly man, and an authority, in an old-fashioned way, upon all

agricultural questions. He was one of the churchwardens of Purrington. The whitewashing of the fresco, however, had been long before his time. I am not sure that he would not have approved of it, but at any rate he must be absolved of all blame attending its accomplishment.

With my uncle, presiding over his household, lived his sister, Mrs. Nightingale, my mother. I was her only child. Of my father I knew nothing, but that he had died shortly after my birth, and that his widow and infant son had thereupon become the charge of his brother-in-law, Hugh Orme.

There are few things the very young estimate more erroneously than the age and stature of the elders about them. I am now conscious that I believed all the mature friends and acquaintances of my early life to be much older, and a great deal taller than they really were. The eyes of childhood are in the nature of magnifying glasses; its point of view is on a very low level. I long thought my uncle to be of patriarchal age, his height colossal. Our cook, whose name was Kem, and who was, no doubt, a robust and portly woman, I held to be an elderly person of most marvellous bulk. And my first impression of my mother suggests to me a lady of advanced years and towering figure. I am now

satisfied that I was much mistaken about this subject. At the time of which I am narrating, my mother must have been still young, and she was scarcely above middle height. She held herself upright, however, and her hair was even then very grey, having been originally of that deep black hue which so rapidly and prematurely blanches. She had well-defined brows, and large, luminous dark eyes; her features were handsome and regular, if her expression was fixed and stern. She spoke in deep, firm tones, with a peculiar distinctness and deliberation of utterance. Her manner was dignified and composed even to severity. She was usually dressed in black, her cap of white lace or fine muslin, gathered and fastened under her chin, as the matronly fashion then was. A certain majesty, wholly natural and unaffected, usually attended her movements.

I entered the house by the back way, through the kitchen, as, indeed, most people did, the front door being seldom used, except on solemn occasions of rare occurrence. Moreover, the shortest way in was certainly through the kitchen.

I knew at once that I was late, for I found Kem—to this day I don't know whether that was her christian or her surname—I never knew her

addressed or referred to but simply as Kem—lifting a steaming pudding from a pot on the kitchen fire. There was a pleasant smell of wet cloth and hot pudding crust.

“Apple, isn’t it, Kem?” I asked.

“Yes, Master Duke; but you’re main late. I thought you were lost. And what a heat you’ve run yourself into. I kept the dinner back five minutes. More I dursn’t do, for the master was terrible sharp with me, and the mutton was spiling. Go in, my dear, before all’s quite cold.”

Kem kissed me, as she was fond of doing, rasping me rather with her rough hot face, a scorched crimson in colour, from her incessant bending over the glowing fire. We were fast friends, Kem and I; and I did not so much object to her caresses, except that they betrayed too pungently her overweening appetite for onions. I wished that she could have have kissed me less, or abstained more from that potent vegetable.

“Where have you been straying, Duke? and how late you are,” said my mother, as I entered the parlour. “And you’re quite out of breath with running. No, don’t speak now. I see you’ve something to tell us. But we’ll hear it by-and-by. Eat your dinner first. It’s your own fault that it’s cold.”

My uncle said nothing. He busied himself with carving the leg of mutton for me.

I may say that as a child I rarely underwent formal scolding or punishment. I was made sensible of my misdeeds by being subjected to a sort of silent and unsympathetic treatment. Moreover, the eyes of my mother and uncle seemed to be fixed upon me, something after a mesmeriser's fashion, for hours and hours together.

I don't think that they were fully conscious of this conduct of theirs, or had adopted and systematised it with aforethought. But people leading as they did secluded lives, in a remote country place, are apt to acquire the ruminating habits of the cattle in their fields. When my uncle, holding his peace, watched me persistently with an air of intense inquiry and meditation, I cannot fancy that I was any more virtually present in his thoughts than I engaged the ruminations of one of his sleek oxen reclining in the water meadow and staring with benignant vacancy at the surrounding landscape. Both seemed to be gazing and studying earnestly ; but probably no real intention or intelligence animated their occupation.

As I ate my dinner in silence, my uncle, watching me, leant back in his chair, and, as his way was,

stirred his finger round and round the interior of his circular snuff-box, as though he were performing upon some mute and diminutive tambourine. My mother also closely regarded me, her thin mittened hands folded before her upon the table-cloth.

The withholding of sympathy is a real punishment to a child; in such wise his natural loquacity is suppressed, and he is denied the privilege of bartering his own small thoughts for the more valuable mental wares of his elder neighbours. A child is a most social creature, much dependent for his welfare and happiness upon communion with the world around him.

I had returned home, bent upon setting forth at full length my adventure at the great house. But gradually my intention waned and relaxed. The difficulties of my narrative became more and more apparent to me; its charms for others less manifest. To begin with, I had to confess dereliction of duty in straying so far as the Hall, and in entering the park.

My story, when the time came at last for telling it, was therefore much more brief and ineffective than I had originally designed it to be. It simply amounted to this: I had met a gentleman who had

taken me into the great house and shown me a picture. I did not describe him as a satyr, and I withheld all mention of the rum-and-water, the pinch of snuff, and the three sovereigns he had given me. It had suddenly occurred to me that my receipt of these might be judged improper or unlawful in some way; or they might be taken from me, and stored in a money-box, for my behoof on some future and far-distant occasion; a possible plan of which I by no means approved. A money-box out of one's own control always seemed to me no better or safer than somebody else's pocket.

"You were committing a trespass, and liable to punishment," said my uncle, very soon after my recital had commenced.

This did not encourage me to extend it. Indeed, I brought it to a close as speedily as I could, conscious that there was very little in it, and that even from my own point of view, its interest had undergone grave abatement.

"You should not wander so far from the farm, Duke," said my mother, simply. "You only over-fatigue yourself. And you should try and be punctual at meal times."

So my adventure, as a story, seemed to be rather a failure. And yet I felt that I had moved the

curiosity of my auditors more than they cared to confess, or than they desired me to perceive. I caught them interchanging significant glances at one point of my relation. My mother once started and seemed about to speak with some eagerness, though she checked herself immediately, and turned to look out of the window. I noticed my uncle's eyebrows lift and twitch; I knew he was surprised at something I had said. Still they shrunk from questioning me, or urging me to narrate with more particularity. Their attitude was one of listening, with a patient indifference that was rather affected than real.

There was a pause when I had finished. It was as though an opportunity was given me to continue or to amplify if I felt so inclined. But I was not incited to go on by interrogations or expressions of interest.

"You had better prepare your Greek *Delectus* for Mr. Bygrave," said my mother, presently. "He comes to-morrow."

I quitted the room; not to study my *Delectus*, however. I hastened up-stairs to the attic, and examined the old engraving I have mentioned. It was blotched with yellow damp-stains and ragged at the edges. I read the name, "N. Poussin," in the left-

handed corner. The chief figure was certainly very like my satyr—wonderfully like. The more I looked at it the more convinced I was of that.

As I descended I heard my uncle's footstep. He was passing from the kitchen to the parlour. I could hear him say to my mother—

“It's true enough. Lord Overbury arrived at the Hall last night. Reuben met him on the London road. He was walking—probably from Dripford.”

“What can he want here?” asked my mother.

“What, indeed!” said my uncle.

And he closed the parlour door. I could hear no more.

Had they doubted my story? It had received unexpected confirmation at any rate. Reuben was my uncle's head shepherd.

But a thing I had never thought about was now revealed to me. My satyr was Lord Overbury. I might have been sure of it, of course; the picture he had exhibited to me portrayed him in his robes as a peer. He could be none other than Lord Overbury. But then I was such a child. I had thought a nobleman must be noble-looking; and certainly my satyr was anything but that. Childish imagination had its limits. I could believe myself Childe Roland, or any other personage of equal chival-

ric fame ; but I had a difficulty in crediting that my satyr—with his dirty face, his crumpled dress, his tobacco and rum-and-water—was really a peer of the realm. Yet such seemed clearly to be the fact.

CHAPTER V.

KEM.

I FOUND I could unfold to Kem what I could not relate to my mother and my uncle. A certain lack of judgment is perhaps indispensable in a child's confidant. Moreover, it was no part of Kem's duty to censure or admonish me. She had but to listen, and bear with me affectionately, as she never failed to do.

My childhood was of a lonely kind, in that I was without companions of my own age. There were, of course, the farm-boys in my uncle's employ; Josh and Jabez, the under-carters; David and Tobias, the ploughboys, and others, with whom I occasionally associated, and from whom my speech caught a Purrington tone and accent—to say nothing of forms of expressions it long retained. But I had no close friends, such as a child usually makes, comrades of his own standing, whose sports he

shares, whose sympathies quicken and support him, and from communion with whom his ideas expand and his character forms and develops. I had passed through a sickly infancy, falling into one violent illness after another, until my survival came to be considered generally rather as a matter for marveling than congratulation. According to the opinion, medical and otherwise, of our neighbourhood, I ought to have died many times over; and it was a kind of charge brought against me that I had persistently disappointed expectation in this respect, besides inflicting infinite trouble upon my only living parent. It was held that the weakly life of a puny boy, with no distinct mission in the world to fill, and with little to commend him to favour in the way of looks or endowments, was scarcely worth all the distress and discussion it had occasioned. That my early death would have stayed all concern about my life was a kind of platitude that met with hearty acceptance and currency in the parish of Purrington. "That boy of Mrs. Nightingale's has been took with scarlet fever now," the neighbours had been heard to say of me, regarding me as quite an incorrigible offender. "It's but six months gone he had the hooping-cough. What will he be up to next, I wonder? The boy will break his mother's heart

sure-ly," they went on. "And she such an excellent woman, too! But there, there's children as seem to come into the world merely to be a worry to their parents. Maybe, however, he won't get over this attack." But I did.

There was in those days no school anywhere near Purrington, so that, even had my health permitted, I could not have been sent from home for educational purposes, except to a distance that in itself constituted a fatal objection to such a measure. The majority of my Purrington friends were stay-at-home people, who took pride in the fact that they had rarely strayed beyond the boundaries of their parish. A desire to travel was viewed as symptomatic of an ill-regulated and discontented mind. A visit to Steepleborough, seven miles off, on market-days, was held to be as much as any reasonable man should achieve in the way of roving from his hearth. That there was safety in the neighbourhood, and peril outside its limits, was a very prevalent opinion. My mother was my first, and for some years my only teacher. I fear my early education taxed severely her own store of learning. She spared herself no pains, however, and even mastered the rudiments of Latin, the better to impart them to me. My uncle lent some assist-

ance, but only in an intermittent way. His own acquirements were limited, and had waned much under the action of time. Nor did he lay much stress, I found, upon the advantages of education—"book-learning," as he termed it. When, at last, my mother found herself unequal to further instruction, and proposed my transfer to the care of Mr. Bygrave, the curate, my uncle, I remember, did not express very cordial approval of the plan. He did not oppose it, however. His manner to my mother had always about it an air of tender deference and consideration, in which I now see much to admire. He sought to comply with her wishes, simply because they were her wishes, and quite apart from his own views as to their worth.

In Kem, over the kitchen fire—not that it was cold, but there being a fire, it seemed compliance with a law of nature to approach it—I found an eager and sympathetic listener. I rehearsed my adventure from first to last at great length; not, perhaps, without that heightening of colour and general embellishment which are almost inevitable in a detailed story. I set forth all I had said to the satyr, all he had said to me, and all I had said after that. I frankly described him as a satyr, which much bewildered Kem, who was without informa-

tion as to that species. For her enlightenment I exhibited the engraving after Poussin.

"I hope he had more clothes on, that's all," said Kem, simply.

I calmed her mind upon that head. But she begged me to remove the engraving from the kitchen, alleging that the sight of it affected her with that grave discomfort known commonly as "a turn."

"But why did you tell him that you was Purrington-born, dear?" she interrupted.

"Well, it was true, wasn't it, Kem?"

"No, dear. You came here, quite as a infant, with your ma, in a po-shay. I remember it well. I wasn't cook here then. But I did field-work for the master. My father was head mower, and I helped nows and thens in the kitchen. Purrington-born you're not, though where born I can't say."

This was quite new to me. And I thought it, at the time, rather an uncomfortable and reproachful circumstance that I was not "Purrington-born," like the people about me.

"You couldn't help it, you know, dear," said Kem, with a soothing air. "One can't choose one's birthplace. It's as it may be, always. And it's never a thing to fret about, or to cast at any

one. I'm Purrington-born myself, and so was father before me. But mother wasn't. She came from Dripford; was cook many years at the rectory there. And she was as nice and tidy a woman as need be, was mother. So you see, dear, it don't hardly matter where one's born, so long as one's English. And you are that, dear, and no mistake."

Still I could see that she rather pitied me, as, indeed, I pitied myself, for not having been born in Purrington parish.

"Kem," said I, after musing awhile, "did you ever see my father?"

"No, dear, never."

"And you never heard of him?"

"No, dear; only that he was dead and gone, poor soul, before you was brought here; and never knew the brave little man his son would grow up to be."

Thereupon she administered one of her heartiest and most odorous kisses.

"I wonder whether he was Purrington-born, Kem?"

But she couldn't tell me. She thought not. Mine was not a name known in those parts, she said. We were both silent and even sad for some minutes, as though pondering this serious matter.

"Now, dear," Kem said at length, "go on telling me about the slater," for so she preferred to call my friend of the Dark Tower.

I resumed my narrative.

"And who do you think the satyr was, Kem?" I asked, as I concluded.

"Who, dear?"

"Why, Lord Overbury."

"Never."

"But I'm sure—that is, I'm almost sure it was, Kem."

"But you said he was a slater."

I now perceived the inconvenience of the romantic aspect I had imparted to my recital. And the reputation I had already acquired as a teller of strange and interesting stories stood much in my way. I had been in the habit of describing to Kem all I had read in books, or chanced to hear of the marvellous and adventurous. Often for her entertainment I had enhanced my discourse by liberal draughts upon my imagination. In return she had no results of reading to communicate, for her education was deficient: she read with difficulty, and in the way of writing could do little more than accomplish her mark; nor was her fancy of a ready or fecund nature; but she had a store

of village lore and nursery legends with which to entertain me. I heard her always with interest; and she in her turn was a most devoted listener. Generally I found her appetite for stories only equalled by her powers of belief and digestion. She had, so to say, swallowed, without a scruple, all the wonders of the Arabian Nights. Suddenly she refused to credit my adventure in the Dark Tower. The mention of Lord Overbury's name seemed to her clear proof of the falsity of my story.

"I thought you were making it up all out of your own head, dear," she said, with a sigh, implying that in such case she would not have withheld her faith. The introduction of his lordship she clearly viewed as an inartistic and unallowable blending of fact with fiction.

"But it *was* Lord Overbury, Kem," I urged. "And, see, this is what he gave me." Thereupon I exhibited the three sovereigns.

She was very reluctant to touch them. "Take care they ain't fairy money, such as you was telling me of the other night, that turns to dead leaves in the night."

It was with difficulty I persuaded her to try their soundness. But at last she rang them upon

the kitchen dresser, and even tested them by denting their surfaces with her sharp white teeth.

"It seems good money, certainly," she said. And thereupon she tendered me the genuine, if commonplace, counsel to take care of the coins—not to let them burn a hole in my pocket, and not to spend them all at once.

"It's like a lord, giving that money," Kem mused ; but still her faith was not whole.

"Did you ever see Lord Overbury, Kem?" I inquired.

"Yes, dear ; but not of late years."

"What was he like?" But her descriptive powers failed her. She refused to allow, however, that he in the least resembled my account of him, or the figure by Poussin.

"No, dear ; he wasn't a slater ; nothing like that. Not that I pretend to know much of the matter. I was never one for staring at the gentle-folks as some do. There's some as will gape and gaze at their betters, as though they was no more than pigs in a pound. But I have seen his lordship, and I bear in mind what folks said of him."

"What did they say, Kem?"

"Well, dear, folks will say most anything. It isn't for me to be judging my betters. But the

word went that he was a bad man, though, as far as I could learn, he did worse harm to himself than to others. Gentlefolks will be gentlefolks, and their ways isn't our ways, and perhaps what would be wicked in poor people isn't of so much account if you're rich. Not but what they said he was poor; though how that could be, and he owning the great house and so much land hereabouts—real good honest land, as everyone knows—is more than I can say. And of course his being poor didn't mean his going to jail or the workhouse, as would happen with me and such like. But there was talk of his horse-racing, and gambling, and that; of his drinking ways—though for that matter there's a many that blamed him that would be glad enough, for certain, to drink as much as him, and more, if they had the chance, and the money. For there's folks about here that's terrible set upon drinking, to be sure. You could no more trust them with a gallon of ale than a cat with cream. But at one time they was all in a charm" (that is, all talking loud) "about his lordship and his wickedness. I heard many a tale of him, but I've most forgot 'em all now. And perhaps such things is best forgot. It's certain sure he was no better than he should be. But it's hard to be reckoning

all the bad ways of a man, and keeping no score of his good. Something I do mind, though, about a young woman of these parts, as 'twas said——”

She stopped suddenly, feeling that there was a certain unfitness about the nature of the matter she was about to disclose. Or more probably because she perceived that we were no longer alone. A third person had entered the kitchen.

CHAPTER VI.

REUBE.

THIS was the shepherd, Reuben Heck, commonly called Reube, a tall, ungainly, gipsy-looking man, with a hooked nose, hawk's eyes, and a thick frill of iron-grey beard hiding the lower part of his tanned, weather-battered face. He was round-shouldered, and slouched as he moved, his knees much bent, and his enormous feet turned out quite in excess even of the fashion prescribed by dancing-masters. In our district Reube was known on this account as a "deaw-bitter," or dew-beater, it being alleged of him that his extended toes brushed the dew off the grass inordinately as he went along.

With a heavy, labouring, clumping tread Reube entered the kitchen. He was understood to be an admirer of Kem's; indeed, the general opinion went that the twain had been "keeping company" for many years. It had never seemed to me, however,

that they were on particularly tender terms with each other, or that their courtship made any kind of progress. Kem was usually very sharp and abrupt in her manner of addressing him, although she may thus have been applying vinegar, as a certain Carthaginian general is said to have done before her, for its softening properties. Reube appeared to be, usually, either in a grinning mood—in which case he was speechless—or in a state of intense gloom and repining, when his observations were engrossed by his troubles and responsibilities as a shepherd; and he could only talk about the lambs and ewes (to be pronounced “yoes”) under his care, especially in relation to the flocks of a rival herdsman, one Garge, employed on an adjoining farm. Between Reube and Garge there existed the bitterest antagonism and enmity, arising from the more or less “farrard” condition of their fleecy charges. To think that such innocent creatures should be the direful spring of so much wrath and malevolence! I don’t remember ever having seen Reube perfectly content and at ease but once; it was when Garge’s sheep were suffering most severely from foot-rot.

Reube’s speech possessed, to quite an infectious extent, the characteristics of our country dialect. Conversing with him, one caught, as of necessity,

something of his drawl and twang, and took up with his queer words and curious phrases. It was so with me, I know; and I observed that Kem adopted a much broader and more provincial language when she addressed Reuben than she usually employed in speaking to myself or to others. But perhaps this may be a sort of involuntary compliment commonly paid to those uttering speech of peculiar quality. I have certainly known many of my compatriots talk broken English to a foreigner indifferently acquainted with our tongue, by way of meeting him half-way, and descending to his inferior level of information.

Reube spoke in a gruff tone, swaying his head from side to side as though he were jerking his words out, giving them a final shake with his teeth before dropping them, like a terrier disposing of a rat. This had the effect of adding a redundant syllable to many of the words he uttered. "Terrible" thus became "terri-able," "surely" "shu-er-ly," and so on.

"There," said Reube, "I be most aveared to look measter i' the face; the lambs be doing that terrible bad, I be all i' a muggle. The weather bloomy too, and no fault to find with narra one. I dunno how 'tis. Another of they chilver lambs

gone dead. As nice and sprack a looking lamb as heart could wish. Things has got in a caddling way somehows. And that Garge'll go grinning and gaping about, and saying as 'tis my vault. Never had such bad luck with the sheep avore—never. Cusnation!" (This expletive, of obscure origin, was a favourite of Reube's). "'Tis amoast enow to break a mun's hairt. I be aveared now to go anighst the vold, lest I should see anither stark lamb. 'Tis main hard upon a mun—so 'tis. I be right down mammered (bewildered), that's what I be."

"Coom, Reube," interjected Kem, pitifully, "hev a dubbin o' drenk" (mug of beer).

"Reube," I said, to turn his thoughts from his professional grievances, and to obtain confirmation of my story, "didst see Lord Overbury yesternight?"

"I see un vast enow," replied Reube, his voice rumbling in his mug. "He was cooming along London Road—from Dripford moast like, where the coach stops. I couldn't think who 'twas at virst; yet I knowed un by sight, though I couldn't call un by's neame." He set down his mug empty, rubbing the back of his red-brown hand over his lips.

"You'd seen un bevore, Reube?"

"Ay, times, Measter Duke. Yet I couldn't, directly-minute, get it into my yead who 'twas. There; I had the lambs on my moind, and was thinking about a hep o' things. But I come upon him close anont the virst milestone out o' Purrington."

"How was he dressed?"

"There; I dunno as I took partickler notice, Measter Duke. But a' had a vrill to's shirt, and a brooch or zummut stuck in's craw (breast). 'Well, shepherd,' a' says—and then I knowed un. 'Twas his lordship, sure as sure. 'Whose sheep be theesum?' a' says—for 'twas anighst the vold. 'Measter Orme's,' I says, and I made my obedience to un; but I couldn't think to call un 'my lord,' as I should ha' done, he'd come upon me so sudden-quick. 'A vine vlock, shepherd,' a' says. 'Ees,' I says, for it weren't for I to be tellun un how poor they'd been doing. 'And are those the chilvers out yonder?' a' axes. 'Ees,' I says. 'Bide where you are,' a' says, and a' ups and looks at 'em. And then he gie I half a crown, 'to git drunk with,' a' says, and then he laughs and shuts his eye, and looks at I again. I was certain sure it was his lordship arter that. 'Twas just his way I'd seen times avore."

"Now, Kem, you see," I said to her.

"And a' went to the great house?" she inquired of Reube.

"A' did. Leastways I see un go thitherwards. 'Twasn't fit I should follow un, so when a'd done talking I hiked off. But I axed old Thacker, this morning, and a' says his lordship came there last night. But what vor, or how long to stay, a' couldn't tell me. 'Tis main drouthy talking," observed Reube in conclusion.

Kem supplied him with some more beer. He was regaled also with what he called a "crim," meaning a crumb, of bread and cheese.

"Isn't Lord Overbury a bad man, Reube?" I asked presently. "Haven't you heard tell so?"

"Surely," he answered. "But it isn't for I to be saying so. He gie I half a crown. I wish there was a many such bad men aboot."

I was inclined to agree with Reube. His lordship had given me three sovereigns. I found a new pleasure in keeping my hand in my pocket. The money was most musical. It chinked with a delightful sound, far above the common jingling of silver or copper coins. My experience, hitherto, had been limited to the inferior metals. Lord Overbury's was the first gold I ever possessed.

Certainly his lordship could not be so bad as people rumoured.

"But you know, Reube," said Kem, "he was terrible wild and wicked."

"Maybe," observed Reube. "He threw away his money, I've been told. Perhaps that's what rich volks most comes into the world vor. Happen there's a poor man to catch it, I don't see there's much to vind vauld wi' their chucking their money about. It's like barley sowing, it seems to me. Sow it in the vurrows and it will come up a credit to you. But some valls outside, and the birds gets it, or it rots and turns to naught. There's allus waste any ways. For horse-racing and jockeys and that, I don't say. The poor man don't gain by that sort, maybe. Yet he may pick up zummut heres and theres. While for women——"

"How can you talk so, Reube," interrupted Kem, "and you setting up for a tidy steady man, and a chapel-goer."

"Well, there," said Reube, "I go to chapel most-in-deal (ordinarily), when the sheep'll let me. But they're amoast too much vor a man. I can't listen to the minister for thinking of things going wrong i' the vold; voot-rot, or scouring, or dead lambs, or what not. I can't sleep o' nights, let

alone saying my prayers. Garge is a church-goer. I seen un times and times going over the down, carrying's prayer-book, though I knows a' can't read un. Oh, he's a church-goer. But there's some volks as has no conscience. I doan't say as a' hasn't got a tidy looking lamb or so amang his vlock. A' knows how to cosset 'em up vor show. And there's vools about as hasn't got eyes to see a whole vlock at ance. They'll look at one or two, maybe, and take Garge's word vor the rest. But there; there's sheep in his vold as I'd be shamed to own. If mine were so desperd bad as some of 'issen I'd take and drown myself in sheep-pond, that's what I'd do. Oh, Garge is a church-goer, certain sure."

"You needn't be so main scrow (cross) about it, Reube," said Kem. "Garge's church-going won't harm un, nor's vlock neither. I'm a church-goer; Measter Duke's a church-goer. We're all church-goers in this house. Not that I say a word against the Methodys. My own mother was one on 'em. And I've known a many main tidy volks Methodys."

"Drattle Garge, that's all I ses," observed Reube, by way of a final deliverance against his rival. After which, the beer perhaps gradually

instilling comfort through him, he fell into a grinning silence as he surveyed Kem. But his mute courtship seemed to have, as usual, but an irritating effect upon its object. The more he grinned at Kem, the more she appeared to frown upon him. She preferred him, I think, in his splenetic moods, when he was maundering about his troubles with his flock, or inveighing against Garge, holding him, perhaps, in that condition, to be more like a sane creature. I remember her once observing that she liked a man who knew how to "downarg"—the word signifying to contradict or argue after a very peremptory and downright manner.

"Thee bist terrible dummell (stupid), Reube," I heard her say as I quitted the kitchen. I concluded that her admirer's grinning was becoming unendurable.

I had to con my lessons for the morrow. A little room had been allotted me for the purposes of study. It was at the side of the house, and looked on to a pathway leading to the farm-yard. Here were stored such books as the Down Farm possessed. Some were old treasures that had long been in the keeping of the Orme family; sermons preached in Steepleborough Cathedral by long-departed bishops, deans, canons, and prebends; works on farming,

account - books, cookery - books, and manuscript volumes full of all sorts of precious recipes for the cure and comfort of human and animal kind. Others had been purchased, as I understood, by my uncle at cheap sales in the neighbourhood, with a view to my mother's entertainment during the long winter evenings. He had bought them by the score probably, with the very slightest heed to their contents. His own reading was confined to the county paper, an organ of True Blue opinions, fiercely expressed, but more valued for its local news ; its readers caring little about politics in that their minds had long been quite conclusively made up on that head. My mother had rarely looked into the volumes, I think ; she read but little ; her sight had failed in regard to near objects, though curiously powerful as to things at a distance. But she valued my uncle's gift, or, at least, the kindness that had prompted it ; always dusting the books herself rather than permit them to fall into ruder hands, providing neat covers for those more ornamentally bound, and remedying with paste or needle and thread such as were in a decayed condition, or had suffered from hard usage. Certain of them she was wont to lay upon the table upon Sunday afternoons as appropriate literary food ; Hervey's Meditations, Blair, Fordyce, Doctor

Young's Night Thoughts, Sturm's Reflections, and a few other such works. It was a mere form, for nobody ever read them; still it was a form which, begun as a duty, was persisted in, rather as a matter of habit than for any clearer reason, except that departure from it would somehow recall and revive its origin, and seem neglect of duty.

Much of this small library I pronounced detestably "dry;" still it contained volumes that were to me thoroughly delightful. I think their existence was known only to myself. Records of travel and adventure, venerable romances, odd, old-world magazines, and collections of fairy tales. One of these last I remember contained in it an inscription in faded ink, "To little Charlotte Augusta, on her birthday." No more than that. I often wondered as to this mysterious maiden. Did she live still? I asked myself. She was dead, probably, poor child, or how could her book have come into my hands? Dead as a child, at any rate, even if she survived as a woman. Had she read it with the fond appetite and admiration I experienced? I should never know. But the book's best stories, I noticed, bore the most finger-marks and dog's-ears. Reading these pages I felt I was following the footsteps down most pleasant paths, with vague childish

tenderness, of the unknown little Charlotte Augusta.

I recollect my distress at finding the story of Count Fathom incomplete—certain volumes were missing. In later years I have thought it quite as well that this was so. But the purity of a child's nature deodorises his reading. The armour of innocence affords very sure and staunch protection.

It was a homely little room enough, yet comfortable withal. Over the mantelpiece there hung a mirror—in which I delighted to view myself transformed by its convexity into a pantomimic creature with a colossal head and diminutive extremities—surmounted by peacock's feathers, a fox's brush, and dry bunches of wheat and barley, ears of phenomenal size and beauty. At the window—on the sill of which stood usually a yellow jug full of flowers—my mother was accustomed to pay the labourers on Saturday evenings, relieving my uncle, on the score of her superior readiness in arithmetic, of this portion of his farming duties. The men came in turn to receive their wages, and with them oftentimes some cheering little present for the sick wife or the ailing child in the cottage home. My mother's desk rested on a side table. The shelves of books were ranged opposite the fireplace.

I sat down to my lessons. But I was too fresh from the interesting converse of the kitchen; my morning's adventure in the Dark Tower still occupied me. I lived in a small and confined world; its molehills were very mountains to me. My Latin exercise distressed me much. There was something wrong with the dictionary; it did not contain half the words I wanted; and then I was in trouble about my pens; they wouldn't write; they would splutter, and blot, and make the thickest of up-strokes.

Those were the days of grey goose quills. Steel had not yet been applied to writing purposes; or at any rate the invention had not come into use down our way. In vain I strove with a blunt pocket-knife and most imperfect art to better my pens. They grew worse; rough-edged, stunted objects, with nibs of unequal pattern and length—like wooden-legged men—I could do nothing with them. I grew hot over my Latin exercise; dissatisfied and enraged with it, myself, the world about me, and the nature of things generally.

I looked round for help. My mother's desk! It contained pens, I knew—bright, clean, transparent quills of perfect form and finish. For she took pride in her penmanship, producing a firm large hand, a

little formal in character, perhaps, but still shapely and most legible. But the desk was usually fast locked. The thing was worth trying, however—my stress being so urgent.

The desk was unlocked, by some strange chance. I raised the lid. I could not at first light on what I sought. When I perceived the pens my eyes fell also upon an object that was new to me—a something of oval form enclosed in a case of soiled wash-leather. Of course I proceeded to examine it.

It was a miniature set in a narrow rim of gold, or what looked like gold—with a ring at the top, through which ran a faded blue ribbon. It was the portrait of a young man, attired after a bygone fashion, in a braided brown coat with a fur collar. He had large dark eyes and refined symmetrical features. He wore his hair combed down his forehead nearly to his eyebrows, and a high full white cravat swathing his neck.

The drawing seemed rather tinted than fully coloured; or perhaps the pigments had dimmed by lapse of time. There was blue sky at the back, and the face was highly finished with that delicate stippling which miniature painters much affected in times past. But the dress and accessories were only sketchily treated, the pale yellow of the ivory

ground being left apparent towards the edges of the picture.

The light was waning, and I moved to the window to view the portrait to more advantage. Suddenly a hand came between me and the light, and closed over the miniature.

“Duke!” said a voice. I knew the voice as I knew the hand to be my mother’s. She gently took the portrait from me before I had half done with contemplating it.

CHAPTER VII.

DEAD AND GONE.

"I MEANT no harm, mother. I was searching for a pen ; I knew you had some in your desk. Then I saw this picture. I couldn't help looking at it. But I was not going to take it away. I intended to put it back. Indeed I did."

"It's wrong to pry, Duke. But I am to blame ; I should have locked my desk." Then she added after a pause : " You may look at the picture if you will, Duke ; " and she replaced it in my hands.

She was not angry with me ; yet there was a certain pained look in her face ; and I noticed that she was very much agitated. And though there were no tears in her eyes, there were, if I may say so, tears in her quivering lips, in the increased paleness of her cheeks, in her low plaintive voice. I had never before seen her so much moved ; and the sight impressed me with a sort of vague awe.

Again I looked at the picture; but I thought of it now less than of her. Her hand rested upon my shoulder as she stood behind me; I could feel that she was still trembling violently, that her breathing was very troubled; I almost fancied that I could hear the quick throbbing of her heart.

"You like it, Duke?" she asked presently.

"I think it's a beautiful picture."

"It's a portrait of your father, Duke," she said, faintly.

I knew not what to say. The picture interested me, but not deeply. I felt dissatisfied with myself that I could not share, could not fully comprehend, the excitement it seemed to kindle in her. I was concerned in that she seemed distressed; penitent, because her evident suffering had been brought about by my thoughtlessness; still her sorrow, her emotion, was not mine.

And the fact that the picture represented my father did not affect me as I had a kind of suspicion it should have done; as indeed, at the time, I could have wished it to do. I was surprised, but not otherwise stirred. Certainly I felt no sudden leaping of the heart; no awakening of new affection; no passionate thrill of yearning. Interest to the

extent of curiosity; but nothing much better or higher than that.

Even to myself this seemed like callousness, heartlessness; and, in a way, shocked me. My father was nothing to me; that was the plain truth. His portrait was to me little more than the portrait of a stranger. But then it is to be said for me that I had never seen him that I could remember; that I, in truth, knew nothing of him. His name was never mentioned; from my mother and uncle I had never once heard even the most distant reference to him. It had been as though he had never existed. He had died and left no trace. My home had not been his. And certainly I had not been taught, as other fatherless children often are, to cherish and reverence the memory of the departed one; to set store upon some words he had spoken, or some deeds that he had done. But for this picture, accidentally discovered, he was not even as a shadow to me.

“My father,” I repeated, mechanically.

“Your father, Duke.”

“And he’s dead.” I scarcely knew what I said.

“Dead.” Her voice seemed a broken wailing echo of mine.

I returned the portrait. She replaced it in her

desk. Then she said, with an effort: "I intended to show it you; but not yet; when you were older; when you could better understand—— But there's no harm done, dear. It shall be yours some day—soon, perhaps; and all I have in the world besides. That's little enough, Heaven knows. Indeed, what have I in the world but you, Duke, my poor boy? But—you shall have the picture—for your own—to keep always; only not yet. And don't speak of it again, dear. Let this be a secret between us, Duke—a close secret, not to be mentioned again by either of us. Try and forget that you have ever seen the picture; that you have ever seen me thus."

Her arms were round my neck, and her tears were now falling fast. What could I say or do to comfort her? I could find no words to express my sympathy, imperfect as it was, because of my condition of wonderment and surprise.

Presently she grew more composed.

"How your forehead burns, my boy," she said, as she kissed me. "Are your lessons very hard to-day? Let me see if I can help you. See, here are pens. Now, which book are you upon? The Latin exercise? Is it really so very difficult? Come, two heads are better than one. Let us try and puzzle it out between us."

She sat down beside me, and took possession of the dictionary. It was marvellous how rapidly her light, deft fingers turned over its leaves; how obedient it became to her, revealing mysteries I had vainly been labouring to penetrate; yielding up its treasures promptly upon her faintest bidding, although, but for a few moments before, it had been striving its utmost to baffle and bewilder me. Yet I knew that her learning on the subject was not in advance of my own. I had been handed over to Mr. Bygrave, indeed, because I was supposed to have outgrown her powers of instruction. She seemed to me like the good fairy in the nursery story, who at a word imparts order and method to the tangled skeins of many-coloured silk. Her magic was simply kindness and intelligence. But she left me particularly well-prepared to encounter my preceptor on the morrow.

Gradually she resumed her accustomed sobriety, and even gravity of demeanour. For usually she had seemed to despise demonstrations of feeling as though she held such to be evidences of weakness and folly; priding herself, I think, upon her courage to endure silently, and to suppress emotional displays. I could not remember that I had ever seen her shed tears before. I felt almost as though I had

once again been stricken with severe illness, for at such times I had learned to recognise her deep and earnest affection for me, shown in her ceaseless watching by my sick cot, her devout solicitude for my recovery and welfare. I fear I had always viewed her toils and anxieties in this respect with the wonted thoughtless ingratitude of infancy, and especially of invalid infancy. The sick child is ever as a despot, imposing taxes and inflicting hardships with the very slightest regard for the convenience or the feelings of those he rules over. Their care, and labour, and allegiance he claims as his lawful dues, nor deems it worth while in any way to acknowledge their prompt payment. Certainly she had not lacked affection for me then, when my need of it was most urgent. And if she seemed, or if I ever fancied that she seemed, to love me less when I was well and strong, it was perhaps because then I had so much the less occasion for her love.

Now, I was not ill; I was even growing quite hearty and robust, and yet she had been betrayed into a curious exhibition of emotion and tenderness. It was very strange to me, and set me pondering much. Could it be only because she had found me with my father's portrait in my hands? That father of whom she never spoke to me—or, so far as

I was aware, to others ; of whose life and story I knew nothing ; concerning whom a reserve and a silence, that were surely strange, had always been studiously maintained ? There was more in it than that. I felt that there must be. But should I ever know how much more ?

I slept but ill that night. The adventures of the day had been of a most unwonted kind. They possessed me, and excited me. I turned and turned restlessly in my bed, and heard the kitchen clock chiming hours that it was a dissipation even to think of ; they seemed so viciously alien to my usual way of life. Had I ever been awake before at two o'clock in the morning ? I asked myself. Only perhaps when I was too much depressed by severe sickness to keep account at all of the flight of time. Yet I heard two strike, and even three ; enjoying the sound somewhat as a new experience. There was a sort of manliness, I thought, in being awake so late, or so early, in defiance of all social prescription, although I was pained, too, by it, for my head was feverish, my bones ached, and I needed and courted sleep. How silent all was ! I could even hear the movements of an uneasy horse in the farm stable, two hundred yards or so from the house, rattling his halter, or kicking against the side of his

box. Was it the old grey, I mused, or the chestnut? And why was he so restless? Did horses ever suffer from the nightmare? Absurd.

There was this remarkable fact about the events of the day. They had brought me into the presence of two pictures. These impressed me the more, no doubt, in that, at my age, I had seen so very few pictures, as I have already stated. But apart from this, they were in themselves notable works, while the manner of my seeing them had been sufficiently strange. The one a tall canvas, that towered above me some feet; the other, a mere scrap of ivory that I could close in my hand. Lord Overbury in his robes as a peer, the size of life; my dead father in a fur-trimmed old-fashioned coat. A miniature portrait. How different! And yet—was it mere fancy?—did not some subtle tie exist between them? or was this their association simply in my childish mind, due to the circumstance that I had seen both on the same day, the one but a few hours after the other?

I was half dreaming. But this I know: the pictures somehow became curiously blended and confused together. They changed places, and changed back again like shuffled cards. Now it was Lord Overbury's face on the ivory; now my

father surveyed me from the elevated position over the library mantelpiece in the great house. They were distinct persons surely ; unlike in feature, air, and expression, and yet there were moments when I could not separate them—when all was blurred, and not two portraits, but only one existed, and this of some strange man I knew nothing of, although by quaint jerks and twitches, as it were, he bore a resemblance of a sort now to Lord Overbury, now to my father. Then, on a sudden, the pictures parted again ; the large canvas was on the wall, the ivory was in my hand. But this satisfactory condition of things was not lasting. Even while I looked at them the canvas diminished and descended from its place ; the ivory expanded and escaped from my grasp. It was most perplexing. For greater certainty it became necessary to search the Latin dictionary—at least this seemed to be the advice of the old grey cart-horse, whose long, wise-looking face, with a tuft of mane hanging low upon his forehead, had suddenly appeared at the foot of my couch. My mother turned over the leaves for me—how quickly ; the rustling of the pages seemed quite to shake the room, and——

“ Why, Duke, do you know what time it is ? ”

I was awake. It was broad daylight. My mother was standing by my bedside, her hand gently resting on my shoulder. I had overslept myself, and had been dreaming; that was certain.

"And the pictures," I murmured, "and the old cart-horse?"

"It's late, Duke. How feverish your hand is. Are you ill; my boy?"

No, I was well enough; but I needed a moment's pause; I had so abruptly been summoned from the land of dreams. Things about me had not yet completely assumed their every-day guise. Their outlines were blurred; their shapes were not yet clearly defined. Familiar objects were still strange to me, not yet wholly released from the mists and magic in which night and fancy had enwrapped them.

Yes, sure enough, I was in my own little bedroom overlooking the garden. My mother had opened the casement, and the morning air was rushing in, fresh from coursing over the downs, laden with the fragrance of the heather and a thousand flowers. And life was in full stir out of doors. The farm-yard was broad awake and busy. The pigeons were fluttering and cooing about; the cocks were crowing stridently, intent

upon the whole world hearing them ; the hens, with maternal “chucks” of pride and jealousy, were calling their broods about them, or proclaiming with excess of triumph, as though it were an entirely unprecedented effort on their part, that they had once again accomplished the feat of laying eggs. Insects hummed in the sunshine, and a butterfly hovered about the window-sill. The air was full of noises : the lowing of cattle, the clamour of pigs, and the whinnying of the farm horses, as they champed their bits or jingled their harness, or beat the ground with their hoofs. “Then, the pictures——” I murmured again, rubbing my drowsy eyes.

“My boy, you’ve been dreaming,” said my mother, as she kissed me. “Make haste and dress yourself, or the breakfast will be all gone.”

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. BYGRAVE.

PURRINGTON opinion was unfavourable to the plan that had been adopted for my education. It was viewed as absurd and even somewhat presumptuous. It was certainly unprecedented. "What be neighbour Orme thinking about?" Mr. Jobling, of the Home Farm, had been heard to inquire. "Is he going to make a passon of his nevvvy? Where be the good of hiring Passon Bygrave to stuff his head wi' Latton and Greek and such like? He'll ruin the boy. Better by half take and send un out to scare the craws or learn to do summat useful. No good won't come on't. I'd learned to plough a straight furrow, and to handle a prong like e'er a man on my farm, long avore I was his age. Besides, who wants a passon coming in and out of a farm house day arter day, like an old woman? It's quite ridic'lous. I'm surprised at neighbour Orme. But, there, 'tis

no use talking about it, I suppose. He seems main bent on it. But I'm none so terrible fond of passions myself; except on Sundays of course."

Sentiments of this kind were so generally expressed that I could not help hearing them. And I, too, was inclined to think that the education Mr. Bygrave was engaged to impart was in the nature of a vain and valueless thing. Why should I be taught so much more than my neighbours? It seemed to me rather foolish, and, what was even worse, feminine, to be instructed in accomplishments they had never felt the lack of. It was like learning to sew or to hem; useful arts in their way, no doubt, but unworthy of a male creature's acquiring. Happily, Mr. Bygrave did his duty, so far as he could, as my instructor.

To the young child education is much as medicine; even if he believe in the draught's power to benefit him, yet he knows that its taste is disagreeable. Or if he begins to quaff it eagerly, his appetite soon fails. He does not yet appreciate the pleasures of duty; wisdom is weariness, and ignorance still blissful to him. He finds it hard to love the preceptor who plucks him from idle delights, tethers him to school-books, and expects him to enjoy the change.

I fear I did not do Mr. Bygrave justice. Decidedly I did not love him. There was, indeed, a certain lack of sympathy between us. He was not, I think, intentionally unkind or impatient, but he was unable to take account of my childishness. He seemed to fancy that my small weak legs could keep pace with his long strides, as we trod together the highways of wisdom. He knew so much himself that he could not credit the ignorance of others. He often taxed me with trying to be stupid, which certainly would have been a supererogatory effort on my part. And my boyish inability to value duly the treasures of classical literature, he estimated as something amazing in its grossness and inanity.

If the authors of the remote past were to me but unappetising food, they were as meat and drink to Mr. Bygrave. The very thought of them always seemed to bring him new support and enjoyment. He lingered fondly over long quotations from them, smacking his lips after his utterances, as though the flavour of fine old wine had rejoiced his palate. He could deliver prodigious speeches from Greek plays, as easily as I could pour out beer. He was, indeed, in love with the dead, and especially with the dead languages, and appeared to have no heart or hope for the living world of to-day. I remember the

almost painful astonishment it occasioned me when I once, by mere chance, discovered that he—so wise a man—had never read the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and was entirely uninformed as to the works of Smollett. He plainly intimated that he despised such productions. It often occurred to me, after this, that Mr. Bygrave had been born some two thousand years too late. How he would have enjoyed, I thought, the society of the ancient poets and historians! As to the opinion they would have entertained of him I could never quite make up my mind. I decided, however, that he would not have looked well in a toga.

He was a tall, gaunt, long-necked, narrow-chested man, with round shoulders, and thin, unstable legs. He had a habit of yawning frequently, stretching his limbs until his muscles cracked noisily, like dry branches in a gale of wind, and opening wide his large mouth to close it again with a crash. He wore always a hungry look, insomuch that my mother was wont to insist that he suffered from insufficiency of food, and invariably provided him with substantial refreshment on his visits to the Down Farm House. His health did not appear to be infirm, although his complexion was pallid and his frame attenuated;

he had a loud harsh voice and a barking method of speech. I often likened myself to one of Reube's lambs driven into classical folds or pastures by the barking of my tutor—acting as a sheep-dog for the occasion.

Mr. Bygrave was respected at Purrington, because, time out of mind, it had been the way at Purrington to respect the clergy. It was true that he only filled our pulpit and reading-desk in consequence of the extreme incapacity of our rector, old Mr. Gascoigne; and that he did not reside at the parsonage, but occupied apartments over the wheelwright's, "up-street," Purrington—it being, by the way, a firm conviction of my mother's that the wheelwright's premises were quite unworthy of Mr. Bygrave's tenancy, and that Mrs. Munday, the wheelwright's wife, in the way of providing and cooking for a gentleman, and generally in looking after his comfort, was but "a poor creature." Still, by reason of his officiating in Mr. Gascoigne's place, and of his being in his own right a clergyman, Mr. Bygrave was generally viewed with deference and regard throughout the parish; it being always understood, however, that he was not to be compared to the rector, but was altogether a priest of inferior rank,

if not, indeed, of a distinct species. In his younger days Mr. Gascoigne had been noted for his skill in field-sports, and famed as a huntsman and a shot. He farmed his own glebe, and his bowling was a thing of which elderly cricketers of the Purrington Club—an institution he had originated, and for some time mainly supported—still spoke with enthusiasm. Mr. Bygrave was wholly without gifts of this kind; he knew nothing of farming; he could neither ride nor shoot; and although he had upon request kept the score during the annual cricket match between Purrington and Bulborough, he had not been entrusted with that office a second time; his inefficiency was too glaring. That he was competent, however, to perform indispensable clerical duties in the way of marrying, christening, and burying the parishioners, could not be disputed; nor was much fault found with the sermons he was accustomed to deliver on Sunday afternoons throughout the year. Purrington did not criticise sermons; viewing them as wholesome performances which were rather to be endured, like surgical operations, than enjoyed, or indeed understood. It was thought, however, that they did good upon the whole; although this estimation of them regarded them somewhat in

the light of the incantations of a wizard of good character. It must be said that Mr. Bygrave's discourses were not, perhaps, very well calculated for a rural congregation. One special effort of his, however, in the course of which he ventured upon certain Hebrew quotations of considerable length, won particular favour from his auditors. It was freely observed in the churchyard, after service, that Mr. Battersby, the vicar of Bulborough, the adjoining parish, could never have come up to that achievement. And that Mr. Bygrave, although a much younger man, possessed "a zight more larning."

Mr. Bygrave's position was not perhaps a very happy one. His means were very limited, and he was wholly without anything like congenial companionship. In such society as Purrington could furnish, he was certainly not seen to advantage. Not that he was shy or apparently ill at ease; but he was without power of speech upon matters that did not interest him, and was unable to sympathise, or to affect sympathy with the subjects that formed the staple of Purrington converse. What were to him the condition of the crops, the prices of barley, of sheep, or of wool? Even the state of the weather was as nothing to him. He never seemed

to know if the sun were shining or not, the wind blowing, or the rain falling. I had seen him on most bitter days, leisurely crossing the down, studying as he went the pocket Horace he always carried with him. Yet he was not perhaps to be pitied. He was happy after his own way. His studies were very dear to him, if they brought little tangible profit to him or to any one else. And he performed his duty fairly to the parishioners; although he *was* charged with reading from the Greek Testament, in lieu of the authorised version, to old Betty Heck, the shepherd's mother, during her long confinement to her bed with rheumatism, asthma, and other complaints. Still Betty had alleged that Mr. Bygrave's reading had done her "a power of good," although, as a matter of choice, she admitted her preference for the visits of old Mr. Gascoigne.

To Mr. Bygrave I feel that I owe much, and that acknowledgment of my obligations has been too long delayed. He compelled my acquaintance with a course of literature, concerning which I should have remained without information but for his labour and painstaking. It was no fault of his that I was but an idle and indifferent pupil, even though something might be said regarding his

defects as a preceptor of extreme youth. But I am sure that he did his best ; I wish I could think the same of my own endeavours.

Our lessons concluded, I often walked back with Mr. Bygrave part of the way to the village. Not that my society was any boon to him. But I was charged to carry certain little gifts of farm produce bestowed upon him by my mother—strong in her faith that the curate incurred the perils of starvation from the reckless incapacity and improvidence of his landlady, the wheelwright's wife. She had been in times long past, it appeared, a servant at the Down Farm, and had undergone summary dismissal for outrageous neglect of duty.

There was not usually much conversation between Mr. Bygrave and myself during these walks of ours. His notion of a pleasant topic would have related to the conjugation of some Greek verb of a distressingly irregular pattern, existing only for the confusion and torture of youthful students. But I held that such matters were quite unsuited to discussion out of school hours. For some time I walked silently beside him, carrying a basket of eggs with rather a boyish longing to upset them, or to ascertain how far the basket could be tilted without danger to its contents. Presently I addressed

him upon a subject that still much occupied me.

"Mr. Bygrave," I said, "did you ever see Lord Overbury?"

It was some time before he seemed to understand me. He had to descend, as it were, from lofty regions of thought to my lowly level.

"Overbury, Overbury," he murmured, "I seem to have heard the name."

Of course he had heard the name. Why, nearly the whole of Purrington parish belonged to Lord Overbury. Surely everybody had heard the name.

"Overbury, Overbury? Ah, I remember. No, I never saw him. It was before my time, some years. But I heard of it at the university. It was a disgraceful affair, I believe. But I never knew the particulars, nor wished to know them. He only avoided expulsion by taking his name off the books. So ended his academical career—unhappy man!"

What was I to make of this? Of what was he talking?

"I mean Lord Overbury," I explained.

"I mean Lord Overbury," he said. "No, I never saw him. Nor should I care to see him."

"He's gone to the great house—the Hall."

"Has he? I don't know that his movements need concern you or me."

And he favoured me with a Latin quotation, which I did not quite follow.

Thereupon we parted, for we had arrived near the wheelwright's. I handed over the eggs, none of them broken, and turned towards home again.

Then I bethought me that I was no great distance from the Dark Tower. What if I were to steal up the gloomy avenue once more, and look about me? Surely no great harm would be done.

I had no plan in view. I was only moved by a vague and idle curiosity. I did not look for another adventure, nor to see the satyr again. I rather hoped not to see him; or I should not so much have minded seeing him, provided he did not see me. I could not count upon his mood being so favourable as when we had met before. And he might reasonably object to my visiting him again so soon. It bore a prying look, as I felt.

I crept furtively up the avenue, startling a cluster of rabbits that I came upon suddenly; but hardly startling them more than they startled me. All was wonderfully still otherwise.

Soon I was close to the great house. I left the

path and hid myself in the shrubbery, peering through a tangle of branches.

The Dark Tower was dead again. The window of the room I had previously entered was now like all the other windows; the shutters were fast closed. It was as though my adventure had never been. The house had resumed its old aspect of emptiness, neglect, dreariness, death.

I turned to depart, for there was nothing to induce me to stay, when I heard a footstep close beside me on the moss-coated gravel walk. Old Thacker confronted me.

I knew old Thacker of course, and rather feared him. He was rough of speech and manner, and his temper was sometimes violent. I had learned to estimate his condition of mind by the colour of his nose, which hoisted, as it were, storm signals when there was peril in approaching him. A crimson hue proclaimed some cheerfulness of disposition; but when his nose was of a deep purple, then he was certainly to be dreaded; at such times he was capable of anything. At least that was my conviction. In the present instance his most prominent feature wore a rosy glow that bespoke the dawn of intoxication. It was, so to speak, in the sunset of ebriety that the deeper tones lowered

upon his face and manifested his descent into wrathful gloom. He might safely be addressed, therefore.

"I hope you're well, Mr. Thacker," I said in my politest way.

"Thankee, I be tarblish middlin'," he answered; meaning me to understand that his health was in a tolerable state. As he spoke he rattled the contents of a flower-pot he carried under his arm, and furnished a sort of castanet accompaniment to his speech. The flower-pot was full of snails. I had never before seen any evidence of his industry as a gardener. "Where bist ga-ing?" he demanded.

"His lordship said I might fish in the lake."

"Fish? There's narra fish there, but an old jack as big as me a'most. He's eat up all the rest. He'd eat you if you was to fall in. He'd eat hisself I do think if a' could only catch hold of a's tail. Tain't no morsel of use fishing there, lad. So you caught sight of 's lordship, eh?"

"Yes," I said, "I saw him."

"Well, he be gone agen, now."

"Gone?"

"Ees; what a' come vor, there, I dunno; nor why a's gone, nor where. 'Tis no use asking, nor

thinking. Tain't no bisness of mine, I suppose. Nor no one's else's, most like. A' comes and a' goes just when a's a mind to."

"You've known him a many years, Mr. Thacker?"

"Ever since a' was a clytenish (pale) chit of a child. And I knew a's vather avore un. Times was different then. But 'tis no use talking. If Farmer Orme's got a few taters he could spare me, there, I'd be grateful. Mine be uncommon poorish, somehows, to be sure. We be all in a caddle. The old ooman's bad with a cough. She took a chill and it pitched, I'm thinking. I be getting these snails for her."

"Snails?"

"Ees; bile 'em in barley water, drink 'em up hot, and they'll cure most any mortal thing."

With this I left old Thacker. I had rarely found him in so amiable and communicative a mood.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGER.

It seemed clear that I had seen the last of Lord Overbury, and that my adventures at the Dark Tower had come to a somewhat tame and prosaic conclusion. It was disappointing, certainly.

As, returned home, I entered the kitchen, I was surprised by the spectacle of a strange figure seated comfortably beside the fire. Faces one had not seen many times before were rare at Purrington, rarer still at the Down Farm, and in such wise to be considered with fixed attention, even with a measure of awe. And the face and figure before me were not only new to me, but presented characteristics that verged on eccentricity.

I turned to Kem for an explanation. I did not speak, but I was conscious that my open eyes and mouth and startled attitude had all the effect of intense interrogation.

"An accident," said Kem. "The——" she hesitated, I know, as to how she should describe the stranger; "gentleman" seemed not wholly appropriate; she hit upon a pleasant compromise: "The good man has hurt himself."

"That sounds suicidal," he interposed. "Rather I have been hurt by a plough-share, I am told, left upon the down. I had missed my way. Night had fallen. Your roads here are somewhat indistinct. Sheep tracks they might almost be called. Not being a sheep I was unfamiliar with them, and their nature. I have heard a phrase as to the cutting of sticks applied to the movements of man's lower limbs. I did not think how literally it might refer to my own legs; let me be correct—to one of them. I was cut on the shin—a tender part as you may be aware—by what, I am given to understand, was a ploughshare."

"It was that gawney Josh Hedges as left un there I'll warnd (warrant)," said Kem.

"Anyhow it wounded my shin; not severely, perhaps, but sufficiently," continued the stranger. "I fell. I think I fainted. I remained upon the down throughout the night. In point of fact my lodging was upon the cold ground; I will add, and damp. I have known snugger and less draughty

abodes. The bosom of Mother Earth is a trifle deficient in natural warmth. I was found by some labouring folks—tillers of the soil? happy peasantry? just so. They brought me here. I have received kindly attention and succour. Such is my brief story. You will, I am sure, under all the peculiar circumstances of the case, excuse my rising.”

I then perceived that his left foot was bare, resting upon the kitchen fender. He had been bathing his wound, which looked rather an ugly one.

“Your mother,” he said, half inquiringly, but he did not wait for an answer; “just so, I had judged as much—has kindly gone in search of some further medicaments—what is called ‘poor man’s plaster,’ I understand. A very appropriate remedy. For I hate disguise; I am not rich, far from it. Thus aided, I don’t doubt that I shall do very well.” He bowed to me as he lifted to his lips a tumbler of hot brandy-and-water.

There was a certain oddness about his air and speech that struck me much. He was perfectly grave, and yet there was a suspicion of comicality underlying all he said and did. Upon my entrance he seemed to have discerned in me a sympathetic auditor, and had addressed to me all his observations,

and kept his eyes fixed upon me. He had a deep fruity kind of voice, and spoke with a deliberation that was almost laboured, as though he prided himself upon the distinctness of his articulation. And as he spoke he moved his eyebrows actively, and waved his hand to and fro in the air. He seemed to gather from my looks replies to his inquiries, nodding his head approvingly, and at intervals permitting a dignified smile to flit across his lips. He had a large round, fleshy face, without whiskers; his hair, dark, curly, and profuse, was piled up high above his head, falling upon his brow like a plume. As I noted this he made a circular movement with his arm and passed his fingers through his locks, carelessly lifting them to a greater elevation. He smiled at me as he did this, and, I think, intentionally, displayed a ring he wore upon his little finger. Admitting the stone set in the ring to be genuine, I judged that, from its exceeding size, it must be of enormous value. But I knew little of jewellery; such opinions as I entertained upon the subject were derived mainly from the histories of Aladdin and Sinbad.


I fear that I stared at the stranger with rude persistency; his aspect somehow fascinated me; I found a difficulty in averting my eyes from him.

Not that this seemed in the least to annoy or offend him. I decided, indeed, that he was rather gratified than not by my gaze. He expanded his chest, and leant back majestically in his chair with an air of exhibiting his proportions to the utmost advantage, and justifying my admiration of him, or at least my curiosity concerning him. Suddenly it struck me that he resembled portraits I had seen somewhere—probably on market-days in Steepleborough shop-windows—of King George the Fourth, attired in the clothes of private life.

He was scarcely so large in the girth, however, as his majesty—judging from his effigies—although he was of full habit, and even corpulent; nor was his costume comparable in point of quality and fashion to the dress of the king. His fluffy white beaver hat, bent and battered about the rim, and disfigured by many weather stains and creases, stood beside him upon the kitchen-table. He wore a blue dress-coat of swallow-tail pattern, rather white about the seams, and buttoning with some difficulty, owing to its being a trifle too small for him; some of its bright buttons had evidently yielded to the severe tension they had been subjected to, and altogether disappeared; here and there, especially high up on his chest, their places had been supplied by pins. A

rusty black silk kerchief was wound round his neck. His legs were cased in nankeen pantaloons, tight at the ankle, but bulging freely, from long use, at the knees. A soiled green ribbon with a copper seal and watch-key—at least, I was convinced that they were not gold—depended from his fob. Dingy stockings and very thin shoes—that had not recently undergone blacking, and certainly needed repair—completed his attire. Beneath his chair there rested a small bundle tied up in a faded cotton handkerchief knotted at the corners, and attached to a rough walking-stick, which looked as though it had been drawn from a hurdle.

I felt that I had been staring at the stranger quite long enough; still I could not depart from his presence. I had never before seen such a man, or such a method of dress. But I now changed my position, and for awhile studied the movements of Kem and the condition of the kitchen fire. Every now and then, however, I indulged in a furtive glance at the stranger. When I did so, I found him still looking at me. Our eyes met. It was certainly awkward. And then my curiosity was newly stimulated. He had produced from his pocket a pair of scissors and a scrap of paper. And, while still looking at me, he was snipping at this paper, hold-



ing it up to the light, then snipping it again, after further gaze at me. He was a most extraordinary man. He had already been too much for Kem. She was stricken dumb; and, as she wildly pared potatoes, her face wore almost an insane expression.

"I call that a fair portrait," said the stranger, and he held up a black shade of myself, placed against a white card for its better exhibition. He had been cutting out my silhouette. Kem was roused from apathy, and as soon as her amazement permitted her speech, she pronounced the portrait perfect, said she should have known it anywhere, and evidently formed forthwith a more favourable opinion of our visitor than she had previously entertained. I felt that the black shade resembled me, though I was but indifferently acquainted with the conformation of my own profile. Still it exhibited a boy with a blunt nose, a sharp chin, a mass of thick untidy hair, and a patch of white to represent my collar. It was clearly my likeness.

"You're an artist, sir," I said, diffidently.

"I may call myself an artist," he answered, with a grand yet not unkindly air. "I really think I may. Not that this trifling is really to be called art. You like the thing?—keep it, my young friend.

Keep it, my friend, in memory of me. A touch of gum or paste will make it adhere to the card. Stick it up over your mantelshelf. Tell your friends, should they inquire, that it is the work and the gift of Fane Mauleverer. A trifle, yet of worth in its way. I've known worse portraits executed by artists of greater pretence. But I am in the habit of speaking modestly—if at all—of my own merits."

I was deeply gratified; I tendered him warm if incoherent thanks, which he received with bland and smiling deprecation. I was even emboldened, boy-like, to intrude further upon his generosity, and begged further demonstration of his artistic endowments.

"Now do Kem's likeness; please do," I pleaded. His kindness had banished my timidity.

"I'm ashamed of you, Master Duke," said Kem, the natural crimson of her face deepening greatly. She objected to being portrayed. She had even some superstitious apprehension, I think, that evil would come of it. She covered her face with her apron.

But the stranger—Mr. Fane Mauleverer as he had announced his name—with an amused expression, snipped a fresh scrap of paper, and not in the east deterred by her movements and objection,

achieved a silhouette of Kem. I thought it wonderfully like—much better than my own, indeed, of which, perhaps, I was not so good a judge. Her cap-strings and frills were beyond praise.

“By special desire,” said Mr. Mauleverer, exhibiting his work, “of the young gentleman whose name I gather to be Duke, a portrait of the exemplary lady whom I have heard designated Kem—a curious appellation; but no matter. Here is Fane Mauleverer’s tribute to the personal advantages of Mistress Kem.”

My mother entered the kitchen. She was much distressed at the mischance that had befallen Mr. Mauleverer. She was about to apply her healing arts to his wound; the matrons of her time were practised in domestic medicine, and she had long been consulted upon all accidents happening upon the farm. But Mr. Mauleverer, with exceeding politeness, declined her aid. He could not permit, he said, that she should attend upon him. And he called her “My dear madam.” His manner struck me as quite courtly.

“No, no,” he said, “I am not the Chevalier Bayard.” It occurred to me that he did not resemble greatly my idea of that chivalric personage. “And my wound is but slight, and not

received in combat, but ignobly, by wandering from my path, and tumbling over a useful, if graceless, agricultural appliance. A strip or two of plaster—so”—as he spoke he warmed the plaster at the fire, and then applied it to his hurt—“and then, I am myself again. I may limp for a day or two. But what matter? I can yet proceed upon my way.”

“You were going to——”

“To Lockport. I had left Dripford in the morning. My trunks, I may mention,” here Mr. Mauleverer looked very grave and cleared his throat, “have been sent on before me. I was told that Lockport was a walk of some twelve miles.”

“Across the down.”

“True. Across the down. But a stranger to these parts—I was never before, indeed, in this delightfully open country—I missed my road. It was not surprising, perhaps. Nor could I obtain directions. One meets but few people hereabouts; habitations are scarce, and sign-posts are not frequent when once the highway has been quitted. But now, rested and refreshed—thanks to your kind hospitality—and my trifling injury seen to, I think I may safely proceed.”

He rose, and took his fluffy white hat from the table.

"It were best for you to remain," said my mother. "A night's rest, Mr.——" she paused.

"Mauleverer—Fane Mauleverer," he said, bowing over his hat, which he pressed against his chest.

"We have a room at your service, Mr. Mauleverer. All shall be done for your comfort. It is not right that you should set forth so soon; night will soon come on—and your hurt is too serious for you to think of walking so great a distance."

"Madam, you overpower me. But—let me disclose myself. You may entertain mistaken notions in regard to me. I am an actor, madam. Nothing more. A poor player on my way to Lockport, having an engagement there during the race-week. I have trod the boards of Covent Garden. But I am now, at your service, a strolling player—that is the world's description of me. I am content to accept it as sufficiently accurate."

CHAPTER X.

OUR GUEST.

"You've a fine barn here," observed Mr. Mauleverer. "Why you might play King John in such a barn as that; and do it well, too. And a nice farm-yard, very nice, indeed; with oxen, sheep, horses, pigs, poultry, and all complete. I like a farm-yard; not that I know much about such things. I'm a Londoner; I'm not ashamed of it; London born. The birthplace of Milton and Byron is good enough for Fane Mauleverer. Somehow I always associate a farm-yard with a pantomime. I expect to hear the music strike up and to see Joey run on, and all the properties change to something else. I can see there's a good deal to be done with a farm-yard that's never been thought of yet. Great sheep-breeding county this, I observe. I know sheep best in the form of mutton; but even in that form not always so intimately as I could wish. Touchstone,

I remember, has some interesting remarks upon sheep-breeding. I played Touchstone once, for my benefit; at Stoke Moggley, I think it was. It was successful altogether. I did not lose more than fifteen and six. Very fair for so undramatic a neighbourhood. Now, there's a fine pig; if he could only come on squeaking like that, under a clown's arm, what applause he'd get! But I suppose he'll be made into pork or bacon as the case may be, and never know the pleasures of public life. A pig 'born to blush unseen and waste his sweetness'—no, that's not quite the right word. 'And smelt so? Pah!' says Hamlet, and throws down the skull. But with all his faults I feel I could love that pig if he came before me in the form of ham. Like many human beings, a pig is more dear to us when dead than when alive. For this pig, however—he'll die obscurely, though not without noise perhaps, and be eaten by bumpkins. I beg your pardon; I meant nothing personal by my mention of bumpkins. They make a very good audience—when you can't get a better. You're fond of the play? Youth, like the butterfly, loves the lamps, usually."

I told him that I had never seen a play.

"Never!" he echoed, with a look of pitiful surprise. "But how should you? You're off our

line of march here. And the villages are so scattered we could hardly hope for a paying house. But all things must have a beginning. You've seen a player, at any rate, and you might see a worse one although I'll own, for I'm modest, you might see a better, possibly."

Our visitor had remained a day or two at the Down Farm. His hurt had somewhat inflamed, and he had been urged to postpone his journey. He was not loth to stay, I think. But he perhaps suffered more than he cared to confess. He had a light-hearted jesting way with him, and was inclined to make light of his troubles. No doubt, in such wise, he succeeded in rendering them more endurable. He was in truth an actor, always acting; but his faculty of investing his circumstances and situation with an unreal air had its advantages.

"I shall miss my engagement at Lockport," he said. "But that's no great matter, perhaps. There's never much done at Lockport. A race-week audience. Pit full of jockeys and horse-dealers. Betting men in the boxes. A rabble in the gallery. And very likely, after all, the ghost wouldn't have walked."

"Were they going to play Hamlet?" I asked.
He laughed.

"You've read your Shakespeare, I see. Good boy. But I did not refer to 'buried Denmark.' I meant a ghost of another kind, that should be more material, but often is not. It's a way we have of saying that there is 'no treasury;' that our salaries will not be paid to us. Yes, they might play Hamlet," he mused, "even without me. They are capable of it. But I pity Shakespeare! 'Twill be the murder of Gonzago, indeed, with a vengeance!"

He limped about the garden and the farm-yard, leaning upon his stick or upon my shoulder. I found him most amusing, though I failed to understand all he said.

"You make a good audience," he observed sometimes with a laugh. "I should play all the better if I could see you in the pit. It's wonderful how a friendly face helps one on."

And then, as he walked with difficulty—and perhaps in his manner of doing this there was something theatrical—he likened himself now to Belisarius, and now to King Lear. In the latter case I assumed that he had cast me for the part of the Fool. It was all wonderfully new to me. I certainly thought him the most entertaining and attractive person I had ever known.

Kem underrated him : was jealous, I believe, of

my preferring his society to hers : and she was quite ill-natured in her observations upon a certain paucity of body linen that characterised his wardrobe. She accused him of wearing a false front—what was then called a “dicky,” and contemptuously viewed as an article of apparel. Mr. Mauleverer made no further allusion to the trunks which he had previously said had been sent on to Lockport before him. I have since come to the conclusion that the trunks had no real existence, and that such property as he possessed he carried with him tied up in the cotton handkerchief. During his stay at the Down Farm he was supplied with linen, carefully aired, from my uncle’s store.

Still I found Kem anxious to listen to all our visitor said, never tired of contemplating him, and altogether much entertained by him, though she tried not to seem so. She still cherished doubts as to his social status, and disapproved his admission to the parlour and his reception as a guest. To Reube Mr. Mauleverer was so impenetrable a mystery, that the shepherd, apparently in despair, withdrew his mind, after awhile, from all consideration of the subject, and sought his sheep as preferable society, on the score of their superior intelligibility. Indeed, by the farm servants generally the actor

was pronounced a "queer quist," and there, as they expressed it, "let bide."

By my uncle and my mother Mr. Mauleverer had been besought to stay in simple kindness and good faith. It was sufficient for them that he was hurt and needed rest.

There had been no question of withholding hospitality from Mr. Mauleverer by reason of his profession. The Down Farm was almost without prejudice on the subject of plays and players. Our district was too secluded, and its inhabitants too dispersed, for strolling companies ever to visit us, even on their way to more profitable neighbourhoods. Some vague belief that acting was an "idle calling," no doubt we held—but not very firmly, on account of our want of absolute knowledge and experience on the subject. Probably had choice been possible, my mother and my uncle would both have preferred their guest's following some other profession; but scarcely for a better reason than that in such wise he would have been a more comprehensible person to them. My uncle in times long past had once or twice visited London, and had seen a play or two acted; but of these exhibitions he preserved but faint memories. So, altogether, Mr. Mauleverer's position was somewhat

that of a mariner wrecked upon an island of friendly and innocent natives. He was to them as a creature from another planet. They were quite content to bind his wounds, help and welcome him to the utmost of their power, and to persist in such hospitable offices so long as he made them no ungenerous return. He was very strange, perplexing, and amazing to them; yet he interested and amused them, in spite of themselves, and so, while he abode with them, was assured of handsome treatment.

To do Mr. Mauleverer justice, he strove his best, I may say he acted his best, to commend himself to the favour of his hosts. He assumed a marvellous polish of manner, as though he were playing a noble lord in some old comedy. He called my mother "Madam," and bowed reverently whenever he addressed her. He listened to her every remark with profound attention. He took a pinch of snuff from my uncle's round box with extraordinary grace; a certain distinction even attended him in the fit of sneezing with which he was subsequently afflicted, not being accustomed, I think, to real snuff. And then, how different he was to Mr. Bygrave! What a flow of conversation he possessed! The swiftness of its current swept us all along with it. He could talk upon any subject and

display interest in everything. Now he was chatting to my mother about her knitting—she was making a warm petticoat for Jim Truckle's wife, to be ready for her by next winter; now he was deep in agricultural mysteries, subsoiling and the rotation of crops, with my uncle. What did it matter that he knew nothing about one subject or the other? He was wonderfully pleasant all the same. And what a fund of anecdote he was master of! He had acquaintance with all the topics of the day, many of them so new, or so recently become old, that we had never even heard of them. He had been in London within the last month, and it was clear he knew that great city intimately. And what a choiceness of diction, a richness of voice, and above all what a play of features he possessed! The way in which he sometimes winked at me, in the midst of his most solemn speeches, was quite convulsing, it was so humorous.

It was curious, I have often thought since, how quickly he appreciated the fact that he was dealing with simple but serious people, to whom levity was distasteful and jesting unpleasant, if not unintelligible. He maintained in the parlour a polished gravity of demeanour, smiling occasionally in a dignified, composed way, but never laughing or

attempting to provoke laughter. Yet he promptly discerned in me mirthful inclinings, and as we paced the garden or the farm-yard, did not hesitate to appeal frequently to my sense of the comical: strove indeed, in a very pronounced way, to stir my laughter, and certainly succeeded.

And then he read Shakespeare to us; not being specifically invited to undertake that task, nor deliberately proposing it himself, but drifting towards it as by mere accident. Some doubt had occurred to him, he said, as to a passage in Hamlet, and did we happen to have a Shakespeare in the house? I produced the volume. He read aloud a few lines, closed the book; reopened it; read from it again; and at last by a gradual process he arrived at favouring us with systematic recitations from the poet. We were all gratified, I think. I was delighted, I know. And I could hear that Kem was listening at the keyhole. Indeed, I opened the door suddenly and discovered her on the door-mat, with the larger portion of her apron crowded into her mouth, as though by such a proceeding her sense of hearing was somehow intensified. I thought his efforts quite triumphant. Of course Mr. Bygrave, whether in reading-desk or pulpit, was not to be mentioned in the same breath with him. He was

pompous perhaps; his facial movements might have been called grimacing by ill-natured critics; and there was something ventriloquial about his strange and rapid diversities of intonation. Still it was very interesting. He made me start, and my skin change suddenly to "goose-flesh" all over, with a sense of an icicle being slipped down my back, when he introduced the ghost! How sepulchral was his speech! A rush of cold dank air as from a newly opened tomb seemed to fill the room.

I was distressed that my mother and my uncle were not more enthusiastic in their recognition of Mr. Mauleverer's exertions. But they were not given at any time to much fervour of expression. The reader seemed content, and smiled with self-approval, as he dabbed his moist forehead in the pauses of his performance. And certainly by their stillness and their air of attention and surprise, they rendered him a degree of homage; though I remembered that once my uncle had, with much the same expression of face, contemplated a dancing dog exhibiting in Steepleborough market-place. But Mr. Mauleverer seemed satisfied with the effect he had produced. He had possibly suffered now and then, in the course of his career, from listless and unsympathetic auditors.

He continued to cut black shades. My mother thought my uncle's portrait unmistakable. He held hers to be decidedly faithful. Each forbore to discuss the merits of his or her own silhouette, I noticed. And then Mr. Mauleverer gave me my first lessons in drawing.

CHAPTER XI.

A TENDER PARTING.

SOME taste or disposition for art I was already conscious of possessing ; but it had scarcely found outlet or expression, save in certain rude drawings executed with a lump of our native chalk upon a tarred barn-door, or in dim designs scratched upon blotting-paper to beguile the tedium of Latin exercises. Now I obtained a measure of methodical instruction from Mr. Mauleverer, and what was perhaps even more precious, encouragement and applause. He was unused to teaching, he stated ; yet he had skill as a master : instructing by example, which is perhaps the best system of instruction.

I was loud in my admiration of his manifold abilities.

“ Yes,” he said, complacently, “ I can do a good many things. That I am much the better for it I’ll not venture to assert. It’s no use making a number

of small bids for success. The thing's knocked down to the highest bidder, who may make perhaps but one offer. Yes, young gentleman, I can act—fairly; I can paint—decently: portraits, landscapes, history, anything, including scenery. That's what I've been doing lately, thereby having a few more shillings—owed to me. Still upon the whole Fortune has not smiled upon Fane Mauleverer, or smiling, she has slid her rewards into other palms than his, and less deserving perhaps. So you would hint. I am obliged to you. I'll not contradict you. I like to hear hand-claps greet me, even though they may proceed from the village idiot on the back bench of the gallery. Not that I am associating you, my young friend, even in thought, with that unfortunate. Far from it. I count you among the box audience—the front row, if you will. I would only hint my appreciation of applause let it come from what quarter it may. I don't despise the copper coinage because of the existence of silver and gold. Half-pence are of use; so I have found. One can buy many things with them—bread for instance. I have known adversity; I admit it; and found its uses less sweet than they might have been, or than the poet has affirmed them to be. Still I have not despaired. I am not of a desponding nature. I persuade my-

self that luck may be in store for me, must be, indeed—put out at compound interest as it were. That there is a vast amount of it standing to my credit somewhere, I am fully satisfied. When it becomes due and payable I shall be a sort of millionaire. Meantime my position is much less enviable. ‘While the grass grows—the proverb is somewhat musty.’ But the world shall hear of Fane Mauleverer yet.”

I thought it hard that so clever a man should have undergone misfortune; and I said as much. He patted me on the shoulder, and smiled a gracious recognition of my sympathy.

“The artist must suffer; it is his destiny.” I noted that by describing himself as an artist the idea of suffering became almost pleasant to him. “It is the price he pays for his endowments.”

He remained with us over one Sunday, I remember, although, on account of his lame limb, he was excused that journey to church over the down, which was invariably accomplished on that day by the household of the farm. I was sorry for his absence from the service for two reasons. I desired his opinion upon the elocutionary efforts of Mr. Bygrave; and I wanted to know what he thought, as an artist, of the whitewashed fresco in Purrington Church.

He assumed much gravity and staidness of demeanour on the Sunday, as though anxious to bring himself into harmony with the feelings of his hosts. His talk was of the clergy ; and he even referred by name to a bishop. I think he said that he had taught elocution to that spiritual peer. Nothing could have been more exemplary than his speech and bearing.

In the evening, at his own instance, he read aloud a sermon by Blair. His delivery was so spirited that the discourse in question acquired extraordinary animation. Looking over it for myself afterwards, I found it even somewhat dull. Yet from his lips it sounded quite stirring. My mother and uncle, I think, were afflicted by doubts as to whether a sermon ought to be made to seem so lively ; whether there was not something unnatural and heterodox in so transforming it. In their experience, perhaps, sermons had been always more or less soporific. But upon this occasion Blair had been most awakening.

I openly expressed regret that our guest did not perennially occupy our pulpit instead of Mr. Bygrave. Mr. Mauleverer deprecated this view of him, and yet was clearly gratified by it.

"The church?" he mused. "As an opportunity for oratory there is much to be said for it. I could

have shone, I think, as a preacher. I could have worn lawn sleeves, with credit to myself and to the spectators—I should rather have said, perhaps, my congregation, my flock. Yes, I could have done much more than has ever yet been done, I think, with the part of a bishop. Still, I will own a certain unfitness on my part for the assumption. *Nolo episcopari*. I am opposed to monotony. I love change: change of life, of dress, of scene, of character. You see, I am an actor, an artist. There is a leaven of the vagabond in me. I own to something of the gipsy in my nature. I am now this; now that. Here to-day; there to-morrow. A bishop for a week—and I should weary of the task. My dignity would fall from me like a worn-out garment; I should be capable of conduct most unworthy of the bench. It is better as it is perhaps; although the present moment does not display my fortunes at their best. No, not the bench for me; but rather the boards. I am at home there; with scope for my versatility. I can paint scenes and exhibit before them in a wide range of characters. My tragedy has been admired, and I have known audiences quite enthusiastic about my comedy. My physical gifts are seen to advantage on the stage; I am usually hailed with applause immediately upon

my first appearance—before I have spoken a word. No wonder. You have observed my head of hair?" he asked, suddenly running his fingers through his locks and raising a great crest above his brow—rather as though he were making a hay-cock. "Prodigious, is it not? Many have taken it for a wig. A genuine compliment to Nature; who can be more bountiful than art, however, when she tries her best. I am grateful for the boon she has conferred upon me. She has saved me much outlay. I have no need of a wig-box. A comb, pomatum-pot, powder-puff, and curling irons, and I am fitted for any character; in five minutes my head can be made ready for Hamlet or Caleb Quotem. A trifle of powder and I am iron-grey—a stern father, a wealthy banker, or a distinguished nobleman; more powder and a little frizzing with the tongs, and I'm Sir Peter Teazle or Doctor Pangloss; a varnish of pomatum simply, and I'm Romeo, or one of the curled darlings who make love to the heroines of comedy. The feats I have accomplished with my head of hair are unknown, save only to myself and my barber."

There was but one failing that could be charged against Mr. Mauleverer, and even that partook of the nature of a compliment to our hospitality. His

admiration for the strong beer of the farm-house was excessive. Often did I note him in the kitchen amazing Kem with his volubility and theatrical manner, and persuading her to fill yet another jug of ale for his private consumption, to beguile the time, as he said, between his meals. He never seemed to be much the worse for his frequent draughts, however; always stopped at a certain stage on this side of intoxication, although he had travelled some way on the road to it. His utterance was always distinct if it became more rapid; and his gestures maintained their gracefulness if they waxed more and more redundant. A rich glow spread over his fleshy face, and a sort of hectic sparkle illumined his eyes. In the morning I noticed he looked somewhat dull and sodden, and his animation, although still remarkable, was perhaps rather the result of effort.

We kept later hours than usual at the farm during his stay. Often after I had been compelled to retire to rest, I could hear his rich voice still exercised in the parlour. He must have enjoyed a kind of monologue. I often wondered what he could find to say to my uncle.

"He is not a sympathetic auditor," Mr. Manleverer confessed to me. "I've played to farmers

and won their favour. But Mr. Orme is not easily moved. He would perhaps have succeeded as a dramatic critic. He misses all my best points. So long as I can talk mangel-wurzel to him I'm all right. Unfortunately I'm not up in mangel-wurzel. Still I managed to come out rather strong on wool and sheep-washing last night. I was not perfect, I admit; but I contrived to fill it out, very creditably altogether."

Mr. Bygrave met the actor, without, however, being strongly impressed by him. The only result was a dissertation with which he favoured me upon the theatre of the ancients. He was of opinion that there had not been much good acting since the time of Thespis. He held the modern stage very cheaply indeed. Why don't they play *Æschylus*? he demanded. I was unable to answer him.

Mr. Mauleverer did not outstay his welcome. There was no inclination to hurry his departure. At least if such a feeling existed there was no manifestation of it. He was the first to speak of leaving the farm, mentioning his intention of journeying back to Dripford, for it availed not now, he said, for him to proceed to Lockport. The race-week was over, and he judged his engagement to be at an end.

"I must hark back to London," he observed, "and start afresh."

I besought him to stay yet a few days longer. But he shook his head.

"I must jog on," he said. "The rolling or the strolling stone must fulfil its mission. I may not gather moss, but at least I shall not get rusty. I must jog on. I must stand on the pavement once more with the lamp-posts about me. Then I know where I am. Besides, I may not remain idly here; I must be up and about. The stage is my farm; I must cultivate it. May it yield me an abundant harvest!"

"You are not happy here?" I asked.

"I am grateful," he said. "Happiness is never where we stand; but always in the distance—on the horizon. We may not reach it; but we needs must travel towards it. And then the country is pleasant, picturesque, salubrious. I don't doubt it; and its victualling arrangements are most ample; but it sends me to sleep, it numbs me. I gain too much flesh here—I have increased a stone's weight; my waistcoat 'plims,' as your local word has it. I have already a corpulent inclining that may unfit me for the slimmer heroes. It must be checked, by toil, possibly even by privation. Your strong beer

offers potent charms; yet must I part from it. Besides, I must put money in my purse. I shall need it; indeed, I have always needed it. Genius is but gold in the ore; one must display and manipulate it to obtain coin and small change for it."

Then I put in execution a plan I had secretly conceived.

"Let me help you, Mr. Mauleverer," I said. I produced my three sovereigns, the gift of Lord Overbury.

"Bless the boy," he exclaimed with a more natural air than was usual with him. "Why how did you come by so much money?" He weighed the coins in his palm and examined them. "Genuine gold as I'm alive." Then he asked suddenly: "You've never stolen them? Pardon me. I am sure you have not. But the sight of so much money is disturbing."

"It's my own—all my own," I said, my face burning as I spoke. And I told him very briefly my adventure at the Dark Tower.

"I would I had been there," he observed. "Lord Overbury?"

"You know him?"

"No. But I have heard his name, in connection

with—I scarce know what at this moment. And he gave you these?”

“Yes, but it’s a secret. No one knows it except Kem, and she’ll never tell. Kem’s always true to me. Please take them. I don’t want them, indeed I don’t. I’d so much rather that you took them.”

“Generous boy!” he said, musingly, looking now at me and now at the money. “How old are you?”

I told him.

“And you’ve no father living?”

“No.”

He covered his face with his hand. I thought that he was lost in thought, until I detected that he was still observing me through his fingers. His nose, I recollect, looked rather red from contrast with his diamond ring which was touching it. In the same way the jewel gained new brilliance.

“No,” he said at length, throwing back his head, and waving his arms in the air. “I’ll not rob the young and the orphan. Perish the thought! Tempt me not, Duke. Take back the money, my brave boy.”

And he turned from me. I implored him anew; assured him that the money was my own to do what

I would with, that he was not robbing me—that it was a cruel word to use. But he would not listen to me. I felt sadly disappointed.

He took leave of my uncle and my mother in the most polite way. In graceful terms he thanked them again and again for the hospitality they had extended to him; entreated my mother to charge him with any commission she might desire to have executed in London, then or at any future time; letters, he said, addressed to him at the Red Bull Tavern, Vinegar Yard, Drury Lane, almost invariably reached him. He promised that he would certainly call to pay his respects should chance ever again bring him into the neighbourhood of Purrington—that if he was ever, indeed, within twenty miles of the Down Farm, he would most certainly visit it, and renew one of the most pleasant friendships—if he might presume to employ the term—he might? he was charmed indeed—that he had ever formed in the whole course of his life.

Then, with his little bundle of clothes tied up in the coloured cotton handkerchief, which Kem had washed and ironed for him—not before it needed that process—and shouldering his rough, knotted walking-stick, he quitted the farm-house, pausing a moment to smile final adieux, and wave

his battered white hat to my mother, who stood at the window watching his departure.

"A gratifying exit, skilfully executed," he said with a self-approving smile and a toss of his head as he strode across the elastic down in his thin shoes.

It had been arranged that I should accompany him as far as the high-road to Dripford, so that there might be no danger of his again departing from his path. I confess that I was anxious to see as much of my friend as I possibly could, and was loth to part from him.

"We shall meet again, my young friend, never fear," he said to cheer me, for indeed my depression was very evident. "I know that we shall—I feel that we shall. The world's but a small place after all; we're for ever running against those we never expected to see again, sometimes, indeed, those we hoped never to see again. I have even encountered, in Lambeth, a landlady I had left in Cornwall. I owed her money, she said. It was possibly true. I do owe money, now and then—often indeed. Trifles that I leave undischarged, now from pure forgetfulness; now, and perhaps more often, from lack of means. We shall meet again. My circumstances may have changed. I may have risen to

fame and prosperity. But to you I shall be ever the same. I am without false pride. I shall always remember the friends who showed kindness to me in my hour of need. Here we part. No, not a step further, my young friend; I remember your lady-mother's instructions. Here is the high-road stretching out plain and clear before me. Good-bye, and God bless you! Go on with your books! Study assiduously under the exemplary Bygrave. Be a good nephew to your uncle, a son worthy of your mother. And so again: good-bye, and God bless you!"

He dabbed his eyes with his handkerchief; but I do not feel sure that he was crying. I know I was.

The white high-road parted us as though it had been a gulf. I began to retrace my steps. By chance I turned to look after him. He had stopped; he was waving his hand to me—beckoning—he had forgotten something; had yet more last words to speak to me. Eagerly I ran to him.

"I have just remembered," he said, "that the coach fare to London from Dripford is of considerable amount; beyond, indeed, the sum I carry with me. A draft upon my bankers in town would probably not be accepted by the coachman. You spoke

to me but a little while back of pecuniary assistance. Three sovereigns I think were distinctly mentioned. I declined them, not rudely, I trust, but still decisively. In these cases, however, second thoughts are often best. If you happen now to have about you——”

Delighted I thrust the money into his hand.

“A thousand thanks. I shall never forget your kindness. You will not mention the matter, I am sure? No, of course not. Still some acknowledgment is due to you. Nay, I insist upon it. Take this, my young friend, and yet once more, bless you and good-bye.” And he hurried on his way.

He had given me a crumpled scrap of paper taken from a greasy pocket-book he carried in the breast of his coat. I scarcely looked at it until he was out of sight. Then I found that upon it was written in rather faded characters, “Mr. Fane-Mauleverer’s Benefit. Admit —— and party to a Private Box.” No date was specified; nor was the name of any theatre mentioned. It was not a document of much worth.

As I re-entered the kitchen Kem said to me: “Old Mrs. Hullock’s been over here from Bulborough. She tells me she once lost a main heap of things when the players went through the village,

years ago. So I've been counting the tea-spoons. They're all right. Please God the linen may prove the same. But I had a terrible lot of washing out drying on the fuz bushes."

I was much disgusted by her suspicions of my friend Mr. Mauleverer. I vouched for his honesty.

"Maybe," said Kem. "But he was terrible short of shirts."

CHAPTER XII.

I ADVANCE TOWARDS MAN'S ESTATE.

AFTER the departure of Mr. Fane Mauleverer, life at the Down Farm seemed to sink back and settle again into its old somewhat monotonous routine. If I sought more adventures I found them not, either at the Dark Tower or elsewhere. Time passed, and we went on in our "usual way," as it is called; changing imperceptibly nevertheless, and the sum of change mounting up considerably as the years lapsed. We grew older for one thing. My uncle stooped more as he walked, and his shoulders owned a rounder outward curve; he complained of a slight deafness on one side and was much troubled as to the proper position of the candlestick when he tried to read the newspaper in the evening. There was a look as of a further fall of snow upon my mother's braided hair, and I noted even upon Kem's rotund, rubicund face, especially in the neighbour-

hood of the temples, wrinkles, and lines, like the starring of a cracked window-pane. For my part I had much increased in stature; from a stunted boy I was becoming a youth of fair proportions, thin and bony, with exposed wrists and ankles, owing to my limbs lengthening without regard to the limits of my clothes.

The neighbourhood had, I think, become reconciled to the fact of my existence, there being no longer occasion for concern as to the state of my health. For I was now really well and strong. But my "goings on," as my manner of life was termed, still furnished materials for local criticism. It was still commonly said about Purrington that "Mrs. Nightingale's boy would be all the better for having some of his nonsense knocked out of him." Which, very likely, was true enough.

But at Purrington very small deviations from conventional ways were sufficient to establish a repute for oddness, and therefore to be condemned as nonsensical. For in our district the new and the strange were viewed with distrust and objection. The farmers' sons about us were usually brought up pretty much as plough-boys; they laboured in the ranks for a considerable time before promotion came to them. As I have already stated, my education,

under the care of Mr. Bygrave, had been the subject of some comment. Such a proceeding had been until then unheard-of in those parts; and the wonder as to "what Farmer Orme could be thinking about to permit of such a thing," had known little abatement. A disposition prevailed, however, to attribute to my mother's unwise intervention the peculiar system that had been adopted in my regard. Farmer Jobling was severely satirical as to the absurdities "a hen with one chick" was capable of, and spoke slightly of the wisdom of women when applied otherwise than to the affairs of the nursery, the laundry, and the kitchen. It was well known, however, that the farmer, for all his freedom of speech, was despotically ruled at home by the good dame his wife.

And presently I was the occasion of a still further outrage upon our public opinion. Some extraordinarily high wave of misfortune had flung upon our shores, so far inland as Steepleborough, an elderly Frenchman who called himself Monsieur Isidore Dubois, but who permitted it to be understood that such was not in truth his name, but had been assumed by him by reason of certain political complications of which he had been the victim. Monsieur Dubois one morning astonished the readers

of our local paper by advertising in its columns his desire to instruct pupils in his native tongue, in drawing, fencing, music, and other accomplishments. This seemed to me quite a providential opportunity for improving myself in art. I had, with Mr. Mauleverer's aid, and with perseverance on my own part, overcome many rudimentary difficulties. I had even arrived at the point of appreciating how little I really knew, how deficient were all my endeavours. It was a genuine step on the road of education: I longed for further qualified assistance. I besought my mother that I might become Monsieur Dubois' pupil.

"Let me see your drawings, Duke," she said calmly, and something sadly, I thought. I produced a pile of sketches of all kinds, attempts at portraiture (one of Reube, sitting on the down with his crook in his hand, and his sheep-dog beside him, I thought decidedly successful), studies of landscape and still life, and designs in great part drawn from memory or imagination.

My mother examined these performances of mine most attentively, and made many inquiries concerning them. I had never known her to be so much interested before in the subject.

She remained silent for some time after she had

completed her examination of the drawings. It was plain to me that she was no longer thinking about them. She roused herself at length with an effort, and said, as she softly pressed my hand, "I have not the skill to judge, Duke. But it shall be as you wish."

My uncle, who had been standing by, silently scrutinising a sketch now and then through his double glasses, turned away and busied himself with his circular snuff-box. Whatever he may have thought of my project, he did not oppose it, my mother's sanction having been secured.

So I became Monsieur Dubois' pupil, visiting him twice a week at his humble lodging at the back of the town-hall, Steepleborough. On market-days I went in and came out with my uncle in his chaise. At other times I generally walked, getting a lift now and then upon one of the carts of the Down Farm, or of neighbours, conveying "produce" to the town.

Monsieur Dubois was a little lean old gentleman, swarthy-complexioned, bright-eyed, and heavy-browed, wearing hair-powder, and even cherishing a diminutive queue, which seemed to frisk about the collar of his coat like the tail of a gambolling lamb in sunny weather. His manners boasted an old-

fashioned redundancy of elegance, and were sometimes so excessive in their laborious grace, as, from the point of view of an English boy, to verge a little upon the ludicrous. Indeed, the Frenchman was commonly voted "monkeyfied" by his neighbours in the town of Steepleborough. Farmer Jobling could with difficulty restrain his laughter whenever chance brought him into the presence of Monsieur Dubois. "He minds me allays of one of those dressed up baboons I've seen in wild beast shows at fair time," said the farmer. "But they mounseers, I take it, are mostly like that. It's no wonder from what I can see that we've allays licked 'em. He's no better than a hudmedud (scarecrow)." To the farmer I traced a rumour current at this period to the effect that I was about to become a dancing-master. Mr. Jobling was indeed more critical upon my receiving instruction from Monsieur Dubois than he had been in the case of my studying under Mr. Bygrave.

Monsieur Dubois was really a most accomplished gentleman, however, if he had undertaken the duties of tuition rather late in life. He was very poor, and might perhaps have paid stricter attention to personal cleanliness. His wardrobe was in a decayed condition, and his supply of body linen was insuffi-

cient. But those were times when soap and water and brushing and combing were less valued by the world than in later days. He found English ways of life very trying, I suspect, and had a difficulty in providing himself with the kind of food suited to his foreign constitution. The rough fare of Steepleborough was to him abominable. He seemed to me to subsist chiefly upon pinches of scented snuff contained in a ragged twist of paper.

He spoke English execrably, and his deficiency in this respect was perhaps an advantage to me. It compelled me to acquire his language as rapidly as I could ; otherwise there seemed little chance of our ever being able to understand each other. Such knowledge of French, therefore, as I can now boast, I owe entirely to Monsieur Dubois. He also introduced me to the masters of French literature, and laboured to impart to me his enthusiastic sense of their merits. He succeeded fairly in this respect, though I have lived to find his taste impeached and his judgments pronounced narrow and obsolete. Even then I was unable to regard Racine and Corneille as superior to Shakespeare ; an opinion he often proclaimed. But then I discovered that he really knew little or nothing of the English poet he was denouncing, in pursuance of the example of his

admired Voltaire, as uncouth, barbaric, and even ridiculous.

I also learnt fencing from Monsieur Dubois. I confess I have not found the accomplishment particularly useful. Still I enjoyed acquiring it. I had not yet completely outgrown my early chivalresque fancies, and Childe Roland seemed still a character I might possibly be called on to resume at some period of my career. I must own, however, that I could no longer view Overbury Hall as my Dark Tower. That delusion was exhausted.

But it was in the matter of artistic instruction that I derived most benefit from Monsieur Dubois. He was himself but an amateur, as he admitted, still his taste and skill were indisputable. His teaching was rather that of the school of David, of whom, if I rightly recollect, he stated that he had been for some brief period a pupil. He laid stress upon classicality of design, even to frigid attitudinising; disdained the charms of colour, and was inclined to limit the scope of art by restricting its choice of subject and method of treatment. In short, he advocated academic views that have now considerably fallen in general estimation. But his insistence upon correctness of drawing as the very

essence of art, was much to the purpose, and of real worth.

It must be understood that I was after all but an immature student, proceeding under serious disadvantages from lack of appliances, deficiency of space in our studio—Monsieur Dubois' little parlour—and from the difficulty of obtaining models and works of art to imitate. Then my lessons were comparatively few and of brief duration. Still I made progress and won the applause of my master.

I may not linger more over these early years of mine, nor descant at length upon such boyish events as my first introduction to sport—my killing my first partridge, my first riding to hounds. Yet these pleasures were not denied to me, and for awhile I enjoyed them fully. Ours was a sporting country, and horses, dogs, and guns were as necessities of life to us. Even my uncle, though age had now somewhat tamed his zeal, and use had cloyed his appetite, had been a keen sportsman in his youth. He was now content with a little hunting in the season when the hounds met anywhere near Purrington, and, mounted on his old grey horse, was usually to be seen holding his place very fairly in the chase. In his character of land-

owner he subscribed, not profusely but sufficiently, to the funds of the hunt, and was always most anxious that a fox should be found in what was known as Orme's Plantation—a thick belt of firs and gorse that skirted his farm in the direction of Steepleborough; and he shot hares and partridges in his own coverts, if with some abatement of his earlier enthusiasm: his sporting tastes having come under the control, perhaps, of his sense of the needs of his larder. As time went on he grew more and more devoted to the affairs of his farm, and his unwillingness to be drawn beyond the boundaries of his own land, even for sporting purposes, certainly increased. At the same time he maintained his interest in the doings of the county hunt, took note of its more famous runs, and was fond of comparing these with past achievements in which he had shared. He took much pains to instruct me in the arts and pleasures of sport. I was a reasonably apt pupil. In this portion of my education, I noted, my mother took little interest.

So I advanced towards man's estate.

CHAPTER XIII.

DRIPFORD FAIR.

I WAS soon to lose the benefit of Mr. Bygrave's services as my tutor. Old Mr. Gascoigne died, and a new rector came in his stead to Purrington. The church was hung with black, and genuine grief prevailed throughout the parish for the loss of its veteran minister. It was true that he had not for some years, owing to his manifold infirmities, been able to fulfil the duties of his office; still his demise was to us like the removal of some ancient landmark, or some long familiar and cherished object in our landscape. The new rector plainly stated that he did not need, that he could not afford, the aid of a curate. So Mr. Bygrave prepared to depart from Purrington.

He gave me, as a farewell gift, his pocket Horace—it was crowded with manuscript annotations in his cramped, minute, scarcely decipherable handwriting,

and was in his eyes his most precious possession. In his stiff, silent, ungainly way he manifested much distress at leaving us. For my part I own to feeling more grief upon the occasion than I could at one time have believed possible. I was conscious perhaps that I had insufficiently valued him. He had dragged me, as a ship might trail its anchor after it, through expansive seas of classic lore. I had but hindered and clogged his progress, while from my position beneath the surface I had been powerless to share or even to comprehend his pleasures. Yet sometimes I had been, as it were, hoisted from below, and, thanks to his strenuous efforts on my behalf, enabled, almost forced, to see and to learn something. I often think now of the opportunities I wasted. More I might certainly have done if I had not weighed so heavily upon his strength, hardening my heart and deafening my ears to his teaching. But a man's judgment and taste are not to be looked for in a schoolboy. In the matter of teaching, children are much like parrots. Their preceptors can but labour to strengthen their memories; their minds are unimpressible and out of reach, if they are to be called minds at all. Mr. Bygrave left me, after all his efforts, imperfectly educated; yet it is due to

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struction in the matter than I could in such wise obtain.

I accompanied my uncle on his morning and evening progress over his land, watching the performances of his labourers, and striving to note the why and the wherefore of everything. But my success was not remarkable. It seemed a simple business; often taken altogether out of the agriculturist's hands by the fickleness of the elements, or governed absolutely by a traditional routine. *This* was done because it was the custom of the country; *that* in pursuance of the prescriptions of the Orme family handed down from father to son since remote times. And each season had its assigned duties and employments. The processes of ploughing, sowing, and reaping followed each other in regular succession; and sheep-breeding, the chief occupation of our farmers, had, of course, its established rules. Yet I felt that I did not gain very satisfactory mastery over the matter.

My uncle was a thoroughly practical farmer. He had been reared to the business upon rough but complete principles. As the custom had been in his time, he had as a youth shared the rude toils, the hard habits of life, almost the frugal fare of the farm servants. Even now, advancing in years as

he was, he could plough as straight a furrow as any man in his employ ; or he could take from the hand of a labourer a scythe, a reaping-hook, or a pitchfork, and show him by sound example how to wield such implements to the best advantage. This was not possible to me. It was not so much that I was above learning or trying to learn these rudimentary arts, but my mother had, I think, interfered to prevent employment of this kind being thrust upon me. In such wise my authority over the labourers was of little force. They viewed me always in the light of an amateur, and I was visited with the contempt usually bestowed upon the unqualified by skilled professors.

And certainly I did not affect the business. I could appreciate its pleasures. I loved the fresh morning air, exhilarating as wine, and scented with a thousand new-born flowers ; the broad rays of the rising sun sweeping over the open down ; the diamond glisten of the dew upon the turf ; the rich tints of the honey-laden heather ; the musical hum of insect life ; the undulating horizon blending its faint purple with the saffron tints of the vernal sky—all this was delightful to me. My heart seemed to leap within me from joyous and redundant vitality as, at break of day, I galloped my

pony hither and thither about the elastic down, charged with some trifling errand to Reube at the sheepfold in the distance. There was no occasion for so much haste; still less was there need to deviate from my path in order to leap a hurdle, or to give chase to a hare suddenly startled from its form and scampering to the covert skirting the farm. Yet it was my humour to do thus much, and many other things that brought derision upon me in that they were inconsistent with reasonable and practical considerations. Listening to the lark soaring high above me, and like a sort of musical rocket showering down sparks of song; or plunging into the long rank grass of the plantation to note the cooing of the wind through the swaying entangled boughs, and scent the fresh resinous odours of the firs; or pausing to watch the flying clouds patch with shadows the wide-stretching landscape: all this was pleasant indeed—but it was not farming. As my uncle was careful to explain to me, I had been better employed in helping spread manure, or feed the pigs.

It was as a part of my agricultural education that I was despatched one autumn on a mission to Dripford Fair to sell a flock of lambs. Reube accompanied me, and though I was nominally in

charge of the expedition, I was conscious that its real governance rested with him.

Dripford Fair was the great event of our sheep-breeding district. It was attended by all the flock-masters of the county. For some days before the fair, clouds of sheep might be seen crossing the down from all parts, slowly making their way towards Dripford. The country was alive with the voices of shepherds, the barking of dogs, and the bleating of sheep. And here and there upon the open landscape large white puffs of dust blurred the view, and marked where the travelling flocks had quitted the turf, and struck the chalky highways leading to the market town.

Reube, in tawny orange gaiters or "vamplets," a gleaming white smock-frock, a scarlet neckerchief, and a blue-ribboned straw hat—his best "donnings," as he described his attire—looked an imposing figure. He was attended by a group of boys and dogs, and carried his crook, his wand of office, most majestically. I felt at once that though mounted upon my pony and clad in the smart suit of a young farmer, I was a far inferior person. Reube was impressed with a sense of his importance, and was conscious of his responsibilities. For he at once relieved me of any fanciful airs of authority I might

have assumed, and took upon himself the supreme control of the mission. He was complacent enough, however, and did not manifest too markedly the cheap terms upon which he held me. He was fairly content with his flock, and it appeared was especially gratified by some scandalous story relating to his old enemy Garge, alleged to have been found lying in the gutter, "up street" Purrington, on the previous night, "terriable drunk to be sure," as Reube related with chuckling joy, "for all a's a church-goer!"

I congratulated Reube on the condition of his lambs, which had been so washed and trimmed and ruddled for the fair that they were seen to the utmost advantage. They were of genuine Down breed, with black noses and feet, and the whitest and fleeciast of wool, long and broad in the back, rotund of body, and yet most nimble of movement. Each bore upon its flank a freshly imprinted black O, denoting that it came from Mr. Orme's farm.

"Eez, they be a tidy lot of lambs," said Reube, "though they might be more forrard. There's a lame un or two among un, but they mouster featish. I've zeen wus, and I've zeen better. Yonder's just about a nice sprack-looking lamb now. I knows un

all by zight as though they was my own childer ; better mebbe. 'Tis use does it, Maester Duke. I zits by um all day long, and I thinks of um all the night through. Please God they brings the maester a tidy zum at Dripford. But I dunno. There'll be a zight of flocks there. No, I beant afeard of Garge. He's got, this turn, just about the poorest lot of lambs that ever I did see. Why they was nigh starved dree months gone, and he'd narra a turmut to gie um. But there, that Garge is nation dummel ; muggle-headed most allays. 'Tis no business o' mine ; but what's maester can zee in un to keep un so long, or to let un go on ruinun the sheep, there, I dunno. But there's volks as seems to trust them as bellocks about the moast. And Garge is a main hand at bellocking and maundering aboot. 'Tis bloomy hot along this dowsty road—brings the het drops on my vorehead, and makes I main virsty, I know. But there's a rare drop of strong beer to be got at the Ram at Dripford, thank God. I wish I had a quart on un now, I know."

We halted now and then on the road to rest the flock, and to enable Reube to refresh himself with his "nummet," or noon-meat, as he termed his luncheon. He consumed with great relish his thick

slices of bread, with a wedge of strong smelling cheese prisoned between them.

Dripford was a dull country town, that once in every year gave way to exceeding delirium. On its fair day it went stark mad, delivering over itself absolutely to sheep—and drink. Sheep poured over it and swarmed about it like an Egyptian plague of an amiable sort. Its every avenue was choked with flocks. You could not move for being wedged in with sheep—thigh deep in sheep. It was as though the skies had opened and rained sheep; as though the earth had gaped and vomited sheep. They overflowed the closely packed pens in the market-place; they surged up the steps of the church in a dense army as though about to carry that sacred edifice by assault; they charged at the town-hall and took possession of every pass in the precinct, occupying shops, doorways, areas, every possible position, in the strongest force. Now and then a light division of lambs was to be seen hurrying along a side street, afflicted by a stampede, or, bent upon some obscure errand, making for the suburbs or the open country. The noise was deafening. The thwacking of sticks upon fat fleecy backs, the pitching of hurdles, the hoarse shouts of shepherds, the barking of dogs as they circled and leapt about,

now arresting deserters by the ear, now springing into the throng to scatter mutineers or bring the listless to attention, made up a bewildering and ceaseless turmoil. All means were tried to reduce the unwieldy armies of timid and perturbed recruits to discipline, and convert them to something like close order. The shepherds were untiring in their efforts to accomplish this, and at last succeeded in their task fairly enough. But their exertions were very great, and the language they employed, by way of fortifying their authority, was desperately bad. A prodigious consumption of strong beer from the taps of the Ram and other Dripford inns, followed upon these proceedings.

But the sheep and the shepherds did not have it all to themselves. The streets were thronged to excess with farmers, flockmasters, dealers, country gentlemen, visitors and sightseers of all kinds. The inns were all choke-full. The stalls were crowded with cattle: useful cobs, that had brought their agricultural owners from far and near, serviceable hacks, clever ponies, and sturdy hunters. The inn yards were full of vehicles of every description, from the yeoman's cart to the phaetons of the more dashing "squire" farmers. The air was heavy and opaque with dust, the smell of sheep and cattle, the

fumes of liquor and tobacco. Throngs of buyers and sellers—red of face, broad of back, and great of girth—jostled each other and argued and haggled and wrangled: now growing fiercely angry, now noisily jocose as they struck bargains and agreed upon terms, and then proceeded to celebrate the concluded negotiation in brimming glasses at the nearest tavern. All transactions were followed by prompt payment in cash, and bundles of greasy notes quickly changed hands and were transferred from bulky pocket-books, like small portmanteaus, to similar receptacles, or from one breeches-pocket of vast capacity to another of like dimensions. And in addition to the uproar of the main business of the fair was the supernumerary Babel usually generated by such occasions: the shouting swarm of pedlars, cheap-jacks, showmen, mountebanks, and itinerant traders and performers of every description.

It was to me a most amazing scene. I had witnessed nothing like it before. I had scarcely believed that there were so many people in all the world as I now found congregated in Dripford.

After much difficulty and delay I had succeeded in stabling my pony at the King's Head Inn, opposite the market-cross. I had lost sight of Reube-

and the flock, but I counted upon rejoining him presently. But it was not so easy to accomplish this as I had fancied. If the sheep were much alike to one who was not their shepherd, it was certain that a strong family resemblance prevailed also among the shepherds. It seemed safer to look out for the black O stamped upon the flanks of our lambs. But I could discover this nowhere. It was like searching for a particular wave in an ever-shifting ocean.

I grew bewildered, and at last from the pressure of the crowd found myself standing still, helplessly and despondently, in front of the King's Head Inn. Suddenly a hand, rather a grimy hand, clutched my fore-arm. I turned and found myself face to face with—my satyr, Lord Overbury!

I recognised him immediately. His hair was greyer, and his dress was perhaps more untidy and crumpled; otherwise he was little changed.

"I know you, my lad. I've seen you somewhere," he said, and he fixed his protruding, blood-shot eyes upon me, and stared into my face. "But I can't think of your name," he continued with an oath.

"I'm Duke Nightingale, my lord."

Still he stared at me.

“From the Down Farm, Purrington?” he said after a pause, as though he had been trying to collect his thoughts. “To be sure. I remember now, of course. You came to see me at the Hall once. How you’ve grown! Yet I should have known you anywhere. You’ve a strange look of your mother. Something about the eyes, I think. But you’re not a patch upon her for good looks. Twenty years ago there wasn’t a handsomer girl in this county than Mildred Orme. And to think that you’re her son! Time flies! Come and have something to drink.”

He drew me into the King’s Head, pushing his way through the thronged passage in the most unceremonious fashion.

CHAPTER XIV.

HIS LORDSHIP AND I.

“WAITER!” cried Lord Overbury. “Bring more mutton-chops. And some hot brandy-and-water. And a bottle of champagne. This young gentleman lunches with me.”

We were in the old-fashioned, low-ceilinged coffee-room of the King’s Head Inn and Posting House. The walls were hung with coloured prints in ebony frames, representing sporting and coaching incidents, with portraits of famous race-horses. Above the small oblong mirror on the mantelpiece a stuffed jack of enormous dimensions glared fiercely in his glass-case, opening wide his formidable grinning jaws. The room had many occupants; but in one corner a table had been reserved for his lordship. There was much confusion, and the waiters seemed so over-burdened with care and labour as to be verging on frenzy. In an adjoining chamber a

farmer's ordinary was being held, and throughout the house the smell of hot food and liquors, and the noise of clattering cutlery and earthenware, jingling glasses and spoons, were rife; while there blew about great gusts of tobacco smoke, of turbulent talk, and stentorian laughter.

Upon his lordship's bidding I drew a horsehair-covered high-backed chair to the table and sat down. I was hungry, and enjoyed the hissing mutton-chops prodigiously, and for the first time in my life I tasted champagne. And I liked it.

My host ate little or nothing. His thirst seemed unquenchable, however. He quaffed goblets of champagne, alternating these with copious draughts of hot spirits and water. Suddenly he bade the waiter bring toasted cheese and a tankard of old ale. He was the same strange, abrupt, jocund satyr I had met years before in the course of my famous visit to the Dark Tower. Only, if possible, he drank more, and took more snuff and smoked more, and laughed more wildly, and fixed his bloodshot eyes upon me more persistently than ever. And his hooked nose was redder; his tusky teeth were yellower.

"And what are you doing at Dripford Fair, Master Duke?" he inquired at length.

I told him of my errand, adding that I had somehow missed Reube and the lambs, and that it behoved me now to try and find them. He laughed much at this.

“ And so you’re a farmer ! To think of that now ! Take some more champagne. A farmer ! And you’ve lost your sheep like little Bo-peep, and don’t know where to find them ! Never mind, my lad ; they’re safe enough. Reube will see after that. Let him alone and he’ll bring ’em home with all their tails behind them. Isn’t that the old song ? Or he’ll bring home the money for ’em, which Farmer Orme will like better. How is old Orme, by the way ? And your mother ? She’s well ? That’s well. But she gets to look old, I suppose ? ”

I did not care to be speaking about my mother to him ; his manner was so strange and rude. Besides, what did he know of her ? What was she to him ? I had but very rarely indeed heard her even mention him in the most distant manner. Yet at some earlier time he had clearly had some acquaintance with her. He had spoken of her maiden name—Mildred Orme—and expressed admiration of the beauty she had once possessed.

Still it seemed idle to take offence at anything he said or did. . Not only because he was a noble-

man, and I was his guest; but in that he was so eccentric altogether, that he was hardly to be held an accountable creature or judged by ordinary standards. Moreover, there was so much noise in the room that our conversation could scarcely be overheard. So I answered him simply that my mother was well, but certainly looked older than formerly, seeing that her hair was now almost white.

“Ah, yes,” he said. “Women are all alike in that. They grow old. Beauty don’t last; the bloom’s soon off it. They fall like wall-fruit in a frost. Eyes go, and hair and teeth, and they wither away. Or they puff out, and make flesh, and get to look like Christmas cattle. Yet I should have thought Mildred Orme would have lasted better. The handsome girl that she was when I first saw her! Not but what she had always the sharpest of tongues, and a devil of a temper. And that ages a woman a good deal. Poor Mildred Orme!”

I felt hot and angry at hearing him talk like this. I rose indignantly, and begged him to remember to whom and of whom he was speaking. He looked at me in a puzzled way for a few moments, as though he failed to understand the

drift of my speech. Then he broke into a noisy laugh.

"Sit down, my lad," he said. "There's no offence meant. You don't want to fight me, do you? A man old enough to be your father! Sit down. I don't forget you're Mildred Orme's son, and a farmer bringing lambs to sell at Dripford Fair." He laughed afresh as he said this. "But you're right to speak up for your mother—quite right, Duke, and I like you the better for it. I've never known, for my part, what it is to have a mother. Better for me if I had. But the poor soul died bringing me into the world. Yet if I caught a fellow saying a word against her, for all I never saw her face, or felt her touch, or heard her voice, by the Lord Harry, I'd wring his neck for him. Always stand by your mother, Duke. I'm sorry if I said anything you did not like. I'd forgotten you were here. I was thinking, my lad, of things that happened long ago. I didn't know I was talking, or what I said." He passed his silk handkerchief across his eyes. Whether the tears that had gathered there arose from excess of drink, of snuff, or of sentiment, I felt a difficulty in deciding.

"You'll have another bottle of champagne?"

You won't? Ah, you've had no sorrows yet, or you'd know the pleasure of drowning them in the bowl—the flowing, flowing bowl!" Here he essayed to sing, but with little success. "Always drown your sorrows, Duke, like kittens, as soon as they're born. It's the only way to deal with 'em. I shouldn't be the man I am, if I hadn't made a point of drowning my sorrows in the bowl directly they came nigh me." This no doubt was true. "And the many sorrows I've had, and the many flowing bowls I've emptied!" he continued. "Whatever the world may say of me—and it's apt to say nasty things of me as of every one else—it can't call me a milksop. Thank Heaven for that!"

It struck me at the time that this was not so very much to thank Heaven for, after all.

"God bless you, Duke. May you prosper in all your undertakings. Amen. Tell Mildred Orme—tell your mother, I mean—Mrs. Nightingale—that's the name, isn't it?—tell her I asked after her, and after your uncle. A wooden-headed, stiff-backed man, Orme, but most respectable; and I respect him accordingly. He's making a lot of money out of my land I don't doubt, and he's a richer man than I am, I dare say—he may easily be that; but he pays his way, and is sober and honest and

straightforward in all his dealings, and I've a great respect for him. He knows nothing of the world or of life, and that's saved him a good deal of money. He's lived like an owl in an ivy bush, seeing and hearing and knowing nothing; still if he's been happy so much the better for him. That's not been my way, as all the world knows; it wouldn't have suited me, and I couldn't have stood it, not for a day, no, not for an hour. But one has to pay for knowing life and the world, a tidy sum, as I've found, to my cost. God bless you, my lad. Very pleased to have seen you grown so tall and looking so spruce; altogether a smart, active young fellow. I was just such another at your age. Take a pinch of snuff. No? Well then, shake hands."

His dingy, hairy hand was burning hot. He shook mine up and down as though reluctant to let it go.

He had seemed to be rather overcome by his potations, which had certainly been recklessly liberal. I thought that he was falling from a maudlin condition of intoxication into a heavy drunken sleep. His speech was thick, his eyes were dim, and he had lost control over his facial muscles. I was prepared to depart, leaving him slumberous and helpless in his chair; when sud-

denly he started, sprang to his feet, shook himself like a wet dog, and by a violent effort appeared to regain command over his faculties, and to overcome the torpor that had been stealing upon him.

"Come out and see the fun of the fair," he cried, as he slipped his arm through mine and drew me towards the street.

He was far from a reputable-looking companion. His curly-rimmed, black beaver hat was stuck on the back of his head; his waistcoat was unbuttoned; his crumpled neckcloth was twisted round until the bow rested under his right ear. He had lighted a long clay pipe, and he puffed clouds of smoke as he went along. The streets were still very crowded, and locomotion was difficult. His lordship proceeded upon a very simple plan. He made way for himself and for me by sheer force, now plunging heavily against this obstacle and overthrowing it; now seizing that (if it happened to be a man) by the coat-collar, and hurling it out of his path. All the while he shouted at the top of his voice wild hunting cries and uncouth utterances of various kinds, well interlarded with oaths. His pipe soon fell from his grasp and was shattered upon the roadway. Every moment I feared that some conflict with the outraged crowd must result

from my companion's violence. But he seemed to be generally recognised, and his strange humours met with extraordinary indulgence. It was understood, I suppose, that there was no malevolence in his rude doings; that he was rather to be laughed at, or even applauded, than censured or attacked in return. The "Corinthian" nobleman was not an unpopular character in those days.

I longed to escape from him, for although inflamed with the wine he had plied me with, I was yet conscious that my position was most unseemly, and that my first appearance in public as a farmer was becoming very discreditable. But Lord Overbury retained a firm hold of my arm; and, moreover, I persuaded myself that there would be something cowardly in abandoning him, and that I was now in some measure bound to him, let his proceedings be never so wild and mischievous. I was very young; and had tasted champagne for the first time. And there was a comical air about his lordship and his doings which I found irresistible. At the same time a remorseful reflection haunted me as to what my uncle, what my mother, would think and say of me, could either know how I was discharging my mission to Dripford Fair.

"Out of the way!" roared Lord Overbury, as

he ran full tilt against a burly, bulky figure that obstructed our progress. The figure yielded but slightly, then turned round angrily to confront us. It was farmer Jobling. What would he now think of the "goings on" of Mrs. Nightingale's son? He said nothing, but with open eye and mouth made way for us, as he touched his broad-brimmed hat and bowed to his lordship.

"Jobling, wasn't it?" asked Lord Overbury of me. "I thought so; one of my tenants—farms the Home lands. Very good fellow, but a prodigious fool—henpecked they tell me; but he used to ride well to hounds when he was a younger man. I've a great respect for Jobling. He's an ass, but he farms in a steady, old-fashioned way, and deals honestly by the land. And he had a tidy breed of sheep at one time."

I was thankful when he turned out of the market-place up a less crowded side street. I had looked round for Reube, but could see nothing of him.

We walked towards the outskirts of the town, pausing for a moment to regain breath, and for my companion to steady himself somewhat, refresh himself with a plentiful pinch of snuff, and rearrange his disordered dress; especially to dispose

of the protruding shirt-sleeves which had issued between his waistcoat and his coat, from the latter garment having been torn nearly off his back in the various encounters he had undergone.

We now approached a piece of waste land, upon which were pitched various booths and tents. Here ginger-bread nuts were vended, with various ginger-bread constructions adorned with Dutch metal; peep-shows were being exhibited, with caravans of wild beasts and natural phenomena of all kinds, feats of contortion and conjuring. Whirligigs went round, and swings sawed and rushed to and fro through the air. Still even this portion of the fair had its business element. Not only was the cheap-jack present disposing of earthen and hardware at unnaturally low prices, and seasoning all his transactions with a superabundance of facetious sallies, but horses and ponies, their manes decked with ribbons and their tails carefully tied up with straw, were also on sale, after being raced through the crowd to an accompaniment of shrill cries and drummed hats. Agricultural implements of a simple sort were displayed to possible purchasers; sporting-dogs were to be bought upon reasonable terms; while in a special corner groups of farm servants were in

attendance to be hired for a year's engagement.

Lord Overbury invaded the booths one after the other, I following him. His manner was still extremely rude and boisterous. "'Tis his lordship," the people said. "A's nation vuddled, but a'means no harm. And a'll go about jest where a's a mind to." He paid liberally for his entertainment, however, scattering his money right and left. But he refused to be bound by the regulations of the establishments he patronised. He pushed past money-takers and attendants, and intruded upon the most sacred mysteries of the caravans. He pinched the famous Fat Lady until she screamed again; he trod upon the toes of the Giant; insulted the Dwarf by grasping the nether portion of his attire and holding him suspended in the air; and he grievously hurt the feelings of the Savage who eat raw meat by accusing him of imposition. Our progress through the fair was indeed desperately riotous.

At one of the larger booths the performances seemed for a time to have terminated. It was called "Jecker's Royal Travelling Theatre," and an inscription above the platform announced that it was "the favourite establishment of royalty, and the nobility and gentry throughout the globe."

Lord Overbury forced his way in at a side entrance, which had been reserved, as it seemed to me, for the performers.

It was the first theatre of any kind that I had ever entered.

It was simply a spacious canvas erection supported by poles and interlacing ropes. But there was a stage at one end, with a proscenium, curtain, and footlights. Benches rising one above another provided accommodation for some three or four hundred spectators. The lamps on the stage only were lighted; but wooden hoops with candles attached hung from the roof, and evidenced that performances were exhibited in the evening.

Lord Overbury's abrupt, resolute method of entering appeared to disarm opposition. We were not questioned as to our object in invading the theatre. It was, I suppose, assumed that we had some right to be there. We stood among a group of the performers, who still wore their professional costumes, although they had partially covered these by assuming rough overcoats of various colours—drab being the favourite.

A tight-rope fixed upon the stage stretched midway into the theatre. It was as thick as a man's arm, and whitened with chalk. A hand-

organ was being played, and discoursed a lively jig-like tune. A girl was dancing on the rope.

"I call her a real good-looking un," said his lordship with an oath.

I thought her simply the most beautiful creature I had ever seen.

CHAPTER XV.

THE "TIGHT-JEFF."

COMPARED with the bright daylight outside, the interior of the tent seemed rather dark; its atmosphere was close, and redolent of smoking oil-lamps and orange-peel. And, perhaps, the mists of wine and general excitement may have disturbed and confused my vision. Yet still I knew on the instant for an absolute certainty that she was beautiful—wonderfully beautiful. I could see that her dress was tawdry and shabby. Unskilled in theatrical illusions as I was, I could not be tricked into admiration of the paltry, almost squalid finery she wore. I could note her soiled and creased muslin skirt that had once been white and was now a lustreless yellow; her frayed silk stockings, much darned at the knees and ankles; her smeared rusty bodice of green cotton velvet, sprinkled with tarnished spangles; the faded, tattered wreath of

artificial flowers, the crumpled ribbons, and strings of glass beads twisted among the rich cables of her auburn hair. I could perceive the coarse dabs of raw vermilion upon her cheeks, outraging so cruelly the delicate harmony of pearls and roses in her transparent complexion. But any creature so perfectly lovely it seemed to me that I had never seen before—not even in my dreams.

She was dancing on the rope to the music of the hand-organ, balancing herself with a long whitened pole. Her every movement and pose struck me as singularly graceful. She was little more than my own age, I judged; a slim, lithe girl, of symmetrical figure, with shapely features, well-defined brows, and brilliant hazel eyes. When her red lips parted, it could be seen that her teeth were exquisitely white and regular. She had smiled as we entered, her brows arching, and her eyes emitting, as I fancied, visible rays, as though they had been diamonds. The light from above, filtered through the weather-stained canvas, poured upon her with a tawny warmth of colouring, save where a rent in the roofing allowed a shaft of blue grey to fall through, and gleam with cold brightness upon her tinsel-trimmed dress. And now and then her satin arms and shoulders caught glowing reflections from

the dim red lamps upon the little stage at the end of the booth. She had smiled but for a moment; gratified, I fancy, at the fact that her performance had its public of unprofessional witnesses. She could note, of course, that Lord Overbury and myself were intruders in the theatre, having no real interest in its concerns. But presently an expression of pain crossed her face. Her eyes half closed, and there came a dint upon her forehead. She was panting for breath; her bosom heaving with extreme rapidity. It was plain that she was becoming exhausted with her severe exertions. At last she paused for a moment, planting her pole in the ground and resting upon the cross-beams of wood to which the end of the rope was attached. She pressed her hand upon her heart and appeared to be nearly fainting.

"Go on!" shouted roughly one of our group, a coarse-looking man with swollen features and greasy hair curved into a roll at the back of his head. He wore a white hat and a pilot-coat, half concealing a spangled, tight-fitting, cotton suit of a nankeen colour.

"Who is she?" I asked of some one standing near me. I did not turn to look at him. I was unable to avert my eyes from the beautiful rope-dancer.

“Who is she? We call her *Mademoiselle Rosetta*, from the Imperial Cirque of St. Petersburg. That’s all I know—except that she’s a pupil of Herr Diavolo’s. That’s Herr Diavolo, in the white hat. And Herr Diavolo’s a Tartar. And Herr Diavolo’s been drinking. And Herr Diavolo’s in a particularly unpleasant mood just now. And I wouldn’t be Herr Diavolo’s pupil, if I could help it, not for untold gold—I wouldn’t. Yes, Rosetta’s Diavolo’s pupil, and she’s catching it. And she’s likely to catch it further and worse before he’s done with her. Unfortunate Miss Rosetta!”

Something in the tone of the speaker’s voice seemed familiar to me. I glanced at him for a moment. But it was plain that I was mistaken; I could never have seen him before. His face was thickly coated with white paint, with here and there odd blotches of red and black upon it. His hair was brushed out and tied into three bunches, one at the top and one on either side of his head. And he wore an odd dress of parti-coloured stripes and stars upon a white cotton ground. Wondering what character he could possibly represent in even the most fantastic kind of stage play, I turned again to look at the dancer.

“Go on!”

"Shame," said someone; but not very loudly.

The man pointed out to me as Herr Diavolo glared fiercely round. I thought him a most ruffianly looking fellow. He stood in a straddling attitude, smoking a short black pipe, and threshing the protuberant calves of his massive bowed legs with a cheap cane. He was rather corpulent, and I noted ridges of fat circling his bare bull's neck. But it was clear that he was possessed of great strength. The bulging muscles of his broad arms could be traced even through the thick cloth of his overcoat. His scowling face seemed sodden and spotted from intemperance. His brother players were clearly afraid of him. Indeed, he looked capable of anything.

"Go on; and keep on going on; and don't stop going on till I tell you, Miss. You've been wanting a lesson this long time, and now you've got it." And he ground his teeth and swore at his pupil, slashing the air till it screamed again with his cheap cane.

I could not resist reverting to the performer in the strange dress who had previously given me information; and then it dawned upon me that all the time I had been looking fixedly at the dancer this performer had been looking fixedly at me.

"She's Diavolo's pupil, as I said. And she broke down this morning—missed her tip, as we call it; that is, made a mistake on the 'tight-jeff': what you call the tight-rope. She fell, indeed; but she did not hurt herself. And he's punishing her. That's Diavolo's way. He's great at punishing his pupils. And if they'd only combine and hang him with his own rope, they'd be doing a good turn for themselves and society generally. Diavolo would perish universally unlamented, I should say."

And still he looked at me intently, and appeared to be watching the effect upon my face of all he said. I had scarcely time to note this, I was so occupied with the lovely rope-dancer. Yet somehow I did contrive to note it.

Presently he touched me on the shoulder.

"Who's that?" he asked in a whisper, pointing to my companion, who had advanced some few paces in front of me, and stood taking snuff furiously, yet not less interested than I was in the performance.

"Hush! It's Lord Overbury."

"Lord Overbury! I thought he was a flash bagman. I wonder whether he'd take tickets for my bespeak." And then he slapped his palms together with an air of sudden discovery, or per-

haps merely to arrest my attention, and he struck an attitude, tilting back his head, curving his arms, and hollowing his back. A vague reminiscence of portraits of King George the Fourth visited me, and then—I knew him! He was Mr. Fane Mauleverer!

"Hush," he said in a hissing whisper. "Don't breathe my name—not for worlds! I am now Signor Leverini; but for a time—a very short time. Solely to oblige the management. I have always been obliging, too obliging. It's been my ruin. I know it. But a man cannot master his nature. An appeal was made to me. Mrs. Jecker was in tears—there's no Jecker now—he's been dead this many a year. We keep up the name, but we're *her* company. She was in tears, kneeling to me. You know my supreme tenderness of heart. Could I bear to see lovely woman in distress? No, she's not lovely; that's a figure of speech; still she's a woman. I could not bear it. Business has been frightful. In this district we're no match for the horse-riders. The neighbourhood's horsey. They haven't minds enough for the stage; but they know a circus when they see one. Things were becoming desperate. The band struck, and vanished like a spark in a tinder-box. There was nothing for it but to fall back upon a hand-organ. We had to

throw over the legitimate and engage extraneous talent to compete with the riders. The tight-jeff, Diavolo and his pupils—that kind of thing. But a clown to the rope, to cackle, to fill up the rests, to chalk shoes, was indispensable. Diavolo—he’s not an amiable man, and he will not make allowances—refused to appear without a clown to the rope. It was offered, beseechingly, to this one, to that, to the other. They hadn’t the will, or say they hadn’t the talent. Could I break Mrs. Jecker’s heart? I couldn’t. I’m versatile. I’m obliging, as I said. So I wear motley; not sinking to its level, but lifting it up to mine. I was really great as clown to the rope this morning. You should have heard the applause. Diavolo’s jealous, and is taking it out of his pupils, as you see. Still I have my feelings. I have played Hamlet and Ranger. I am humiliated. This is my own hair you observe; no clown’s scalp for me; my own hair frizzed out, pomatumed, and tied; an entirely new reading of the part. There’s not another man in the profession could do it as I have done it. But it’s not fair to me; I was born for better things. And to think that you should see me thus! Not a word to your excellent uncle, to your lady mother. I told you we should meet again, Master Duke. My presenti-

ments are unerring. Still, I didn't think that you would find me clowning amongst the boothers. I said that you would find your way to a theatre. Right, you observe. Though I did not count upon Jecker's being the place precisely. I talked of Covent Garden, I think. Well, well, that may be yet. And Kem is well? and the farm thrives? and the pigs? and the poultry? and the old ale is as rich an amber, as potent a drink as ever? How you've grown! And what a country russet glows upon your face! With a trifle of padding you might go on for Romeo. Hallo!"

Our attention was recalled to the rope-dancer.

Her looks were very angry. She was now white, now red, quivering in every limb with excitement and exhaustion.

"I'll dance no more," she said hoarsely, with flashing eyes.

"Go on," roared Diavolo, as he beat his calves with his cane quite fiercely.

She jerked her chin in the air with looks and gestures of superb defiance. Then she flung down her balancing-pole, hung with her hands from the rope for a moment, and dropped lightly on to the ground.

"I won't go on, beast!" she said, and she confronted her master.

throw over the legitimate and engage extraneous talent in company with the riders. The night-jeff, Diavolo and his people—this kind of thing. But a clown to the rope, to cackle to fill up the rests, to chalk sides, was indispensable. Diavolo—he's not so sensible a man, and he will not make allowances—refused to appear without a clown to the rope. It was offered, beseechingly, to this one, to that, to the other. They hadn't the will, or say they hadn't the talent. Could I break Mrs. Jecker's heart? I wouldn't. I'm versatile. I'm obliging, as I said. So I went midway: not sinking to its level, but rising in up to mine. I was really great as clown to the rope this morning. You should have heard the applause. Diavolo's jealous, and is taking it out of his pupils, as you see. Still I have my feelings. I have played Hamlet and Ranger. I am humiliated. This is my own hair you observe; no clown's scalp for me: my own hair frizzed out, pomatumed, and tied; an entirely new reading of the part. There's not another man in the profession could do it as I have done it. But it's not fair to me; I was born for better things. And to think that you should see me thus! Not a word to your excellent uncle, to your lady mother. I add—
we should meet again, Master Duke.

ments are unerring. Still, I didn't think that you would find me clowning amongst the boothers. I said that you would find your way to a theatre. Right, you observe. Though I did not count upon Jecker's being the place precisely. I talked of Covent Garden, I think. Well, well, that may be yet. And Kem is well? and the farm thrives? and the pigs? and the poultry? and the old ale is as rich an amber, as potent a drink as ever? How you've grown! And what a country russet glows upon your face! With a trifle of padding you might go on for Romeo. Hallo!"

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There was the sound of the cheap cane slashing through the air; and then a feminine shriek of pain.

I was horrified. For a moment a blood-red curtain obscured my sight, sparks danced before my eyes, and my heart was leaping to my mouth. I staggered, then plunged forward to do—I know not what. If I could have found my hands clutching Diavolo's throat, how happy I should have been! But before I was fully conscious of what had happened I found myself pulled back by some one. Diavolo was prostrate with a bleeding face. Lord Overbury, his hat and coat flung far from him, with clenched fists, was hovering near him, almost dancing round him.

"Pick him up!" screamed his lordship, with a furious oath. "Put him on his feet again. The cur! The coward! Stand back, all. I know what I'm about. To strike the child! Come on! Ah, would you!"

Diavolo had slowly risen, and now made a heavy rush at his foe. But he was stopped suddenly, and struck to earth in a moment, bleeding afresh and senseless.

"His lordship knows how to put in his left," whispered Mauleverer. "I call that very pretty practice."

CHAPTER XVI.

ROSETTA.

“He’s had enough, I suspect,” said his lordship, quietly, “if not so much as he deserved. Give me my coat, some one. Where’s my hat? He’ll remember me. I’m an old un, but I’m good for something yet. I’m out of condition, with smoke and drink and one thing and another; but I haven’t quite forgotten how to use my hands. Let’s have a look at him. Don’t crowd round, you fools. Let the man have what air there is. He’s not so much hurt, although that’s a pretty-looking ‘mouse’ under his eye. He would have it; and so he got it, straight and hard. Clap a bit of raw steak on—the best thing for it in the world. For his nose—well, that *is* rather a nasty cut at the side; but a strip or two of plaster will soon put that to rights. One thing, it isn’t the kind of nose you can spoil the beauty of, do what

you will to it. Get him a glass of hot rum-punch some one; here's money; get glasses round for the company while you're about it." He gave gold to one of the performers, who hurried from the tent to the nearest tavern, to return forthwith with a bottle and glasses.

"Where's my boy?" Lord Overbury turned to me. "Learn to use your fists, Duke; they're uncommon handy articles when you know what to do with them. There's no blood on my face, is there? Not a scratch, eh? That's all right. He got pretty near me once, though; and if I'd given him only half a chance he'd have been too many for me. There's bulk enough, and power enough about him; but no speed, and not a ha'porth of science. And he'd been drinking; but so had I for that matter. I'm always drinking, worse luck. Come, old chap, look alive." He went up to Diavolo, who was now sitting on the ground dabbling his face with a ragged cotton handkerchief, and staring about him with an air of savage stupidity. He seemed as yet but half conscious of what had happened. "You're knocked out of time, that's all. So has many a better man been before you. You'll be all right after a bit; only mind how you slash about with that cane of yours

another time. And keep it off women and children; especially when I happen to be in the way. That's my advice. Do you hear? Come, don't bear malice. It was a fair fight. Shake hands."

But Diavolo did not grasp the proffered hand. He failed to understand what was required of him; or he was too wrathful to forgive the success of his antagonist. He simply rolled his head from side to side and growled inarticulate menaces.

I addressed Rosetta. My heart throbbed, and I felt that I was blushing violently.

"You are not hurt much, I hope?"

"No, not much. I'm used to it."

She had been crying though, and her tears had washed away streaks of paint from her cheeks. Her profuse hair, with threads of red gold mingled with its rich brown, had fallen over her forehead in a tangled mass. She was very beautiful.

Suddenly I saw, crossing her neck and shoulder, the scarlet line left by Diavolo's cane.

"Ah!" I cried, "but it must really pain you. The wretch! the monster! How could he dare to strike you."

"He's my master; I'm his apprentice. He thought it right, I suppose. Perhaps I deserved it. But I hate him, I hate him, all the same. Of

course it hurt me. But what is it to you? It didn't hurt you, I suppose."

"Indeed it pained me very much."

"Yet you didn't move. It wasn't you that knocked him down. It was that ugly old man there. Your father? Well, he's old enough. Your friend, then? Your schoolmaster, perhaps; for you're only a boy. Yet he doesn't look much like a schoolmaster. Anyway, I'm grateful to him."

"I wish, indeed, that I had interfered; that I could help you, serve you, do anything for you."

"But you didn't, you see; you couldn't, perhaps; being such a mere boy."

I felt vexed at this description of me.

"At least I would have tried. I would have risked my life. But," I was conscious that this was weakly said, "I wasn't quick enough."

"That's just it." She laughed mockingly through her tears.

"Another time——" I began.

"What! Do you want to see me beaten again? No, thank you. Some one might step in again before you. Never mind. Don't cry about it."

"I'm not crying." But, indeed, the tears somehow were gathering in my eyes, I was so provoked at her teasing manner, at her so persistently and

wantonly misunderstanding me. "Or, if I am, it's not for myself, it's for you."

"Well, well," and she smiled and gave me her hand. "You're a good boy, I think; and I daresay some other day, when I'm beaten again, if you're standing by, and plenty of time is allowed you, you'll spring forward to defend me, and be beaten too, perhaps. A lot of good that would do!"

"I should be content so that I saved you a blow."

"That's well said. There, I'm sure you mean kindly, and I dare say are brave enough in your own way, choosing your own time and place. You don't look like a coward, I'll own that. Don't blush."

"I'm not blushing."

"Oh, but you are. I didn't think a man could blush like that. Why a girl might envy such glowing cheeks! But then, to be sure, you're not a man, as yet; and I think you'd be better at home, or at school. What do you do here at fairs, forcing your way into our booth? You know you'd no business here. If I'm to be beaten, I'd rather not have the public looking on. You should have waited and come to the regular performance, and seen me dance."

"I did see you dance. You danced exquisitely. I never saw anything so beautiful."

"Thank you. But you saw me beaten too."

"It made my heart bleed, it did indeed."

"That shows you shouldn't have come; you should have been at home, learning your lessons. Oh, you came with your friend. I see. But do you think he is quite the right sort of friend for a boy—well, for a young man—like you? He calls you Duke. Why? You're not really a duke, are you?"

I had again to explain, confusedly, the abbreviation of my name.

"Marmaduke! What an odd name. I thought you couldn't really be a duke, you know. Though, of course, dukes are boys sometimes. Marmaduke! Marmaduke what?"

"Marmaduke Nightingale."

"I shall remember that. And your friend? what's his name?"

"He's Lord Overbury."

"Lord Overbury? A real lord? He doesn't look like it. You're sure? You're not hoaxing me?"

"A real lord."

"To think of that! I don't remember ever seeing a real live lord before. And in our booth. Seeing me dance on the rope. Seeing me beaten.

But he gave it Diavolo well. How strong he was ! What a blow he struck ! Diavolo went down as though he'd been shot. I thought he was killed. How glad I felt ! Ah !” and here she sighed, “ but it will be all the worse for me by-and-by, perhaps.”

Lord Overbury approached us, having, possibly, heard his name mentioned. He had been busy laughing and drinking with the company.

“ Well,” he said roughly to Rosetta, “ so you’re the little girl that’s been the cause of this row. Well, you’re good-looking enough, anyhow. The cane hurt you, didn’t it ? They used to cane me a goodish bit when I was a boy, and it hurt then, I know. And on these pretty shoulders !” he patted her white neck with his grimy hand. I hated him for it. “ Come, I deserve a kiss, I think.”

“ Take one then,” and she calmly proffered him her cheek. He kissed her.

I shuddered ; and I remembered again with painful distinctness the old engraving at home of the Satyr and the Nymph, after N. Poussin.

Mauleverer drew me aside.

“ You’d better see about getting home, hadn’t you ? At any rate I think I’d get away from here if I was you. You see it isn’t quite the place for you. We’re a strange lot, and it’s a pity to see us

at our worst. Go home to the Down Farm, Master Duke. I should say, Mister Duke. If his lordship could be got away from here it would be quite as well, too. He's no business here; and, somehow, when people like him come among us, it isn't for our good altogether. I'm not thinking now of benefit tickets, or the patronizing' of bespeaks, or the standing of glasses round. Good things in their way. I should be the last to deny it. But there's something else to be thought of. Rosetta——"

"Yes. What of Rosetta?"

"Well, she's a good little girl enough, and clever—Diavolo teaches his pupils well, though he's not the kindest of masters—and pretty, as you can see for yourself. It would be a thousand pities if any mischief were to come to her out of your visit here to-day. Now wouldn't it?"

"You mean——"

"No, don't press me. You can guess my meaning."

"You don't think that I could possibly injure one so young, so beautiful? Mr. Mauleverer, you do me grave injustice."

"My dear boy, I don't think that. You admire her? Well, I'm not surprised. The child's uncommonly pretty. No. Your coming here will do

harm only to yourself, though you'd get over it soon enough, very likely. But *his* coming here," he lowered his voice, and jerked his thumb in the direction of Lord Overbury, "do you think that's likely to do her any good?"

His lordship was laughing and talking with Rosetta. She was pleased, it seemed to me; flattered by his attentions, amused by his rough jesting manner. How hideous he looked by the side of her! Could it be that she was forgetting his ugliness, his age, his uncouthness, his half-intoxicated state, remembering only that he was a lord?

"She's pretty and she's vain. She is fond of admiration; but that's a common failing. And to be admired by a lord after being thrashed by a savage—what a contrast! It might turn her head, or any woman's. Better get him away if you can. You're his friend. Though he's not the friend, I take it, they'd choose for you at the Down Farm. He's what you see him—a lord—and not a very nice kind of lord to my thinking. And you're—what? a young farmer? May I say a very young farmer? You see you don't meet on equal terms, neither as to age, position, nor, thank God! character. Get him away for her sake, then; that's the stronger argument, to judge by your young tell-

tale face. In any case, go home, Duke, and give us a wide berth. This isn't the place for your mother's son."

It was much the same advice as Rosetta had already given me. But, in his odd disjointed way, Mauleverer spoke with an earnestness that contrasted curiously with his usual method of discourse, with his whitened face, his crested tufts of hair, and his striped clown's dress.

It was sound counsel enough. Clearly I had no business in the booth among the player folk. Lord Overbury was certainly no fit companion for me. His society was little likely to profit me.

But it was not on these accounts I sought to draw him away. It was because he was conversing with Rosetta; because, though in a quiet and innocent, rather abashed way, she appeared to be gratified at what he said. I could not hear his speech. But I noted that her eyes were studying the ground, or the soiled sandals that encased her shapely feet, and, it seemed to me, that she was blushing with a sort of pleased surprise through the smeared clouds of vermilion upon her cheeks.

I touched his lordship on the arm.

"We'd better go, I think."

He shook my hand off roughly.

"Let me bide," he said with an oath. "I'm well enough as I am. Get away with you, boy."

"You again!" said Rosetta, as with a mocking smile she raised her eyes and turned her bright glance full upon me. "Good-bye, Duke."

She looked lovely; and so happy, that somehow I felt pained and miserable.

A bell rung.

"Clear out!" cried a rough voice.

"You must go now," said Mauleverer. "We're on again with another performance. Take my advice, Duke, and get away home. Forget that you have ever been here—especially that you have ever seen me like this. I do assure you that I do it solely to oblige the management. Nothing but Mrs. Jecker's tears, and the thought of her orphan children, could have brought me to it. Clown to the rope! It seems—it sounds—absolutely incredible. Not a word about it at the Down Farm. Pledge me your honour—nay, swear—swear by your sword—not a syllable upon the subject. I should sink into the ground should your mother discover me thus. You remember our Shaksperian readings? and that sermon—by Blair, wasn't it?—on the Sunday? It was a fine elocutionary effort,

though I say it. I wish I had time to cut another black shade of you. But it's not possible. The house is filling. Something I could have made of his lordship, too, in the black shade way, had but time permitted. Good-bye. Nay, don't look back at Rosetta. A dancing girl; the tight-jeff business; there's a thousand of 'em about, far above Rosetta, though she's a clever child, I own, and pretty, if you insist upon it. Good-bye. We shall meet again, I'm sure of it, under happier auspices. I may be playing Hamlet, but I'll not warrant it. The time is out of joint, and tragedy is not what it was. But you'd like my Charles Surface. Remember me; but not as clown to the rope; promise me that. I do it solely, after many tears and entreaties—solely to oblige Mrs. Jecker. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mauleverer."

"Hush, for your life—Leverini!"

He wrung my hand and we parted. I quitted the tent, turning round after a few paces: was it in the hope of catching one more glimpse of Rosetta through the opening in the canvas? Mauleverer was still standing there.

"Solely to oblige Mrs. Jecker!" he shouted after me.

Then seeing that a small crowd of rustic youths had gathered about the entrance to the booth, I noted that he assumed a clown-like attitude, heard him utter clown-like crows and chuckles, and presently, with pantomimic facetiousness, affect to snatch a plough-boy's felt hat, of basin pattern, from his head. This done he vanished.

What was I to do? What, but to go home again, as Mauleverer had advised. There was nothing else left me to do.

I would go back to the King's Head and have my pony saddled. It was my mood to gallop him back to the Down Farm as fast as I could. I felt dissatisfied, and uncomfortable, and perplexed; why, I hardly knew. If I had before been flushed and elated with wine, that was quite over now.

Reube was standing at the door of the stable-yard of the King's Head.

"Why, Maester Duke, where'st bin to? Amwoast lost, I be thinking. This Dripford be a main caddling place. There, I dunno how we come to get atwo (divided). But 'tis no wonder. The market be all in a muggle, and all the streets about so neoust of a neoustness (nearly alike). I've zold lambs—ah, and zold um well too. I beant aveard to

look at measter in's vace. There weren't a tidier lot o' lambs come to market."

He told me the price and the particulars. I am ashamed to say I took little heed of what he said.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE ROAD HOME.

REUBE looked elated and flushed; partly with triumph, and partly, I think, with strong beer. Indeed, he owned that he had enjoyed a quart—pronounced to rhyme with cart—at the Ram Inn, with a “mossel” of cold beef—“main good tackle.”

I inquired, by way of saying something, how his rival Garge had fared at the market.

“Why, just no how, Maester Duke,” he answered, laughing loudly. “There, I never zet eyes on such a gawney. Why his lambs weren’t worth nothing at all. Dree on um dropped dead on’s way hedder, and a’ lost vour in market somewheres; couldn’t find um noways for an hour or more. Garge was vuddled, shims (it seems). A’ spoke to I. But I told un I didn’t want none of’s saace. A’ wanted to fight, a’ did. ‘Get whome virst,’ I ses to un.

‘I’ll vight thee then, I’ll warnd, if thee’st a moind to ’t. But not in thic market-plaace. I’ve summut else to do with theesum lambs.’ A’ shogged off bellocking and kind o’ huffed. I didn’t zee un agen. But I heard zay athin (within) the Ram as a’d zold a’s lambs. I didn’t hear the price. I pities themmin as be going to eat um. There bain’t no more vlesh on some on um than on hurdle yonder. There, I never did zee such a footy (paltry) lot o’ lambs. But Garge caan’t abide to hear un zay so. We never could gee (agree), Garge and I. And never shall, s’pose. I’ll vight un vast enough if a’s a moind to’t when a’ gets whome.”

I counselled Reube against quarrelling with a neighbour, and told him he had now better journey back towards Purrington, obtaining a lift, if he could, in any of the market-carts returning homewards. I promised to overtake him before he had gone far upon the road.

He seemed in no way surprised or disturbed that I had been missing from the market-place, and had taken no share in the sale of the Down Farm lambs. He had, perhaps, expected some such result; or was too much occupied with his own success to note my shortcomings.

My pony was saddled; but I bade the ostler

take him back to his stall again. I felt a strange reluctance to quit Dripford. Yet I could not account even to myself for my irresolute condition of mind. Why did I linger? In the hope of seeing Lord Overbury again? No. Or Mauleverer? No. Or Rosetta? Again I answered, no; but this time less confidently. Vague unsatisfied longings possessed me. I knew them to be absurd and unintelligible, yet I could not be rid of them.

In any case I persuaded myself that there was no need for my hurrying home—that I had ample time before me. As a reasonable excuse for remaining, I fancied that I was hungry, and ordered dinner in the coffee-room of the King's Head. But when it was served I could not eat it; my appetite had vanished. I could only drink a few glasses of sherry—the first wine I had ever ordered on my own responsibility. I sat, however, for some time, twiddling my glass and sipping the rather fiery compound—trying to look as though I liked it, anxious that my neighbours in the room should not think me so ill at ease as I really was in my unaccustomed position.

Then I paid my bill, went round to the stable, looked at my pony, prepared to mount him, and then—again abandoned my intention. It was grow-

ing dusk, but it was still early. It would not take me long to gallop back to Purrington. I would saunter for awhile through the streets of the town. It was fast emptying. But a few pens of sheep were now left in the market-place.

I could hear the din, I could see in the sky the glare of the fair on the outskirts of the town. I turned in that direction. Lamps were lighted in front of the chief booths. Bells were being rung, gongs sounded, trumpets blown. There were hoarse invitations to the crowd to "walk up," and the marvels of the various shows were being uproariously proclaimed.

I found myself again in front of Jecker's Travelling Theatre. Scarcely knowing what I did—certainly my mind had not been made up a second before on the subject—I paid and entered, taking a seat in the division of the booth set apart for the box audience.

The theatre was fairly full; the atmosphere close and oppressive from the scent of flaring tallow candles. It was the first dramatic performance I had ever witnessed. I was surprised that it interested me so little. My feeling, somehow, was one of discontent and disappointment. I could not surrender myself to the illusions of the scene; all

seemed to me distressingly coarse, and mean, and spiritless. The fault was in me, perhaps, rather than in the performance. I was preoccupied; expecting, hoping for, I scarcely knew what. The actors won much applause of a rude kind; I sat still and silent. I felt like one in a dream, conscious of dreaming, persuaded of the emptiness and unreality of all that was happening.

Mauleverer did not appear. Nor Diavolo. Nor Rosetta. The rope, I noticed, had been removed. I could still see in the ground, at my feet, the exact place where its cross-bar supports had been erected. It was plain that there was to be no tight-rope dancing.

The performance lasted little more than half an hour. I was weary of it long before it terminated. Could the theatre I had so often thought longingly about proffer me no more attractions than these? The stage—was this all? The players—these ill-dressed creatures, with daubed faces, and harsh voices, so graceless of gesture, so uncouth of presence?

There was nothing now to keep me in Dripford. The moon was up; it was a fine clear night. I could not miss my way. I had but to keep to the straight turnpike-road until I came to the track

branching off across the down to Purrington. A mound of chalk sufficiently marked this out. Besides, if I chanced to miss it, my pony would not, it was very certain.

For a mile or two out of Dripford there were many travellers upon the road, returning from the fair—light carts and heavily-laden farm waggons, and horsemen in small parties. Songs were being sung with prolonged and rather tipsy choruses; and the smell of beer and tobacco lingered in the air. Now and then a wayfarer, overcome with fatigue or with excess of liquor, was to be seen curled up and dozing under a hedge. I overtook, too, I remember, a sergeant with a party of recruits bound for the barracks at West Poolborough, and with a long night's march before them, somewhat damping to immature military ardour. But the sergeant was inspiriting them with wonderful stories and occasional songs, keeping a sharp look-out, too, that none of his charges strayed or escaped.

At last I seemed alone on the road. I could give my pony his head. Moreover, I could take him on to the turf of the down which now ran parallel with the road, and so save his feet. He was soon at a hand gallop.

Suddenly I saw the flash of a lantern ahead,

and heard the sound of wheels. A chaise rapidly driven was approaching me on the down. In a minute or two I could discover that the horse was a piebald, and that two men, much muffled up, sat in the chaise.

"Yo ho! yo ho!" one of them shouted to me. The chaise stopped.

"What is it?" I cried, pulling up.

"Duke!"

"Who calls my name?"

"It *is* Duke. I felt sure of it," said the man to his companion.

"Who the devil's Duke?"

I knew them then. Mauleverer, and with him Diavolo. I could see the strips of plaster on his nose.

"What has happened?" I asked, as I moved to the side of the chaise.

"That's just what we don't know, for certain," said Mauleverer. "But I'm glad to see you, and alone. I thought—I half suspected—yet I knew it couldn't be. When did you leave Dripford?"

"Little more than half an hour ago, or it may be three quarters."

"You've seen nothing of Rosetta?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"You know nothing of her?"

"Nothing. What has happened? No harm, I trust."

"I can't say about harm."

"For Heaven's sake tell me what you mean, Mauleverer."

"Well, she's gone; been missing since four o'clock this afternoon."

"Gone! alone?"

"That's just what I can't tell you. We had news of a post-chaise hurrying along the road. She may have been in it; or she may not. There's no saying. Still it seemed worth inquiring about. So we borrowed this horse and trap from Slinger's Circus; and we've been miles along, over the plain. For no good that I can see."

"You've seen nothing—you've heard nothing of her?"

"Nothing; that is, we traced the post-chaise part of the way. But they knew nothing of it at the gate over the hill this side of West Poolborough, I think it's called. So we've missed it, somehow."

"It may have turned off at the cross road by Little Denton."

"Where would it get to then?"

"Well, it might go through Bulborough and Lisford some miles on, and so into the London road."

"And then turn north or south, I suppose! A pretty fool's errand I'm come out on. This comes of being good-natured and obliging. My bane through life. Here am I, not so young as I was, and a man of full habit, running about this wild endless plain in search of a twopenny dancer on the tight-jeff!"

"Let me find her," growled Diavolo, "and I'll break every bone in her body."

I fervently hoped that he might not find her.

"And Lord Overbury," Mauleverer further inquired, "where did you leave him?"

"In the theatre with you. I've not seen him since. But you don't mean——" a painful suspicion stirred within me.

"Yes, I do," he answered. "Would she be absconding in a post-chaise by herself? Why, she hadn't a sixpence in her pocket; had she, Diavolo?"

"Not a rap," he grunted, with an oath.

I began to pray that Diavolo might find her.

"You'll not give up the pursuit, Mauleverer?" I said, excitedly. "For Heaven's sake try and

bring her back. Think how young she is—how beautiful. Save her. She must be saved.”

“It’s easy to say that. But the piebald’s done. He’ll go no further. He’s a first-rate trick-horse, and will stand a deal of wear and tear. But he was at work in the ring all the morning; and he’s gone over twenty miles on a hard road since. It can’t be, you see. Besides, it’s a wild-goose chase. It may be all a flam about the post-chaise. There’s no knowing. We may find her safe and sound at the booth when we get back, if we ever do get back. She may only have been playing truant—sulking and hiding in a corner, as girls will, you know.”

“I trust, indeed, it may be so.”

“Good night! We can’t miss the way back, I suppose?”

“No, straight as you can go.”

“Good night. Get along, piebald.”

A flourish and crack of the whip, and the piebald, panting and steaming, resumed his labours. I remained for some minutes watching the vanishing chaise, the dimming light of the lantern they carried; listening to the gradual dying away of the sounds of the wheels, the creaking of the springs, and the rattling of the harness. Mean-

time, my pony was pawing the turf with his hoof, anxious to be moving again, homewards.

But there was something coming along the road from Dripford—slowly, heavily—a market-cart drawn by a lame horse.

“Isn’t it most time you was at home and abed, young fellow?” shouted Farmer Jobling, as he passed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DAY AFTER THE FAIR.

WILD thoughts occurred to me of rushing off somewhere—I knew not whither—in quest of Rosetta; of taking up the pursuit where Mauleverer and Diavolo had abandoned it. But what could I do? It was all too hopeless. And yet I felt furious at the thought of remaining idle while she was in peril. For I could not doubt that she was in peril. She was missing for certain. If she had fled alone it was bad enough; so young as she was, so fair, so poor, so helpless, so inexperienced as she needs must be in the world's ways, temptations, dangers. But if she had gone with Lord Overbury, had been lured away by him! I could not bear the thought. It was too terrible.

It was clear I could do nothing, but hope that, as Mauleverer had suggested, all would prove to be

a mistake, that she would be found at Dripford on his return.

Yet to think that all the time I had wasted loitering idly about the town, this had happened! I had been close at hand, and yet again had never stirred on her behalf, to protect her against her enemies, perhaps against herself. It was maddening.

My pony left to his own devices—for I was too much preoccupied to heed much what became of him or of myself—carried me safely home. As we mounted the shoulder of the down that sheltered the hollow in which the farm-house was built, I noted that a light was burning in the kitchen.

I rang the stable bell and roused a sleepy servant; resigning the pony to his charge, I then entered the kitchen. My mother was seated by the fire, her knitting in her lap.

"How late you are, Duke! I feared something had happened."

"I was detained, I should say perhaps that I stayed to see the fair by night."

"Rueben has been home hours since."

"And my uncle is satisfied?"

"Quite satisfied. But he is suffering a little. He complains of his rheumatism. He went to bed

early. But he seemed pleased the lambs had sold so well."

"It was all Reube's doing. I had no share in it. He told you so, perhaps?"

"No, he said nothing of that."

"It's true though. I missed him somehow. The place was in such a whirl."

"It matters little, Duke, so that you're home again, safe and well. How your hand burns! You're not ill, my boy?"

"No. I'm well enough, only—— Pardon me, mother; I did not mean to speak so roughly."

"You're tired, Duke, that's all. No wonder. It's been a long day, and all's been very new and strange to you. A good night's rest——"

"Mother," I said suddenly, "I met Lord Overbury in Dripford."

"Indeed!" She started, and it seemed to me that she had turned pale. But the light was not strong; the candle on the kitchen table was burning dimly, and the fire was sinking into a dull, flameless red.

"He knew you," she asked, rather faintly.

"Yes. He invited me to lunch with him."

"It was kindly meant, perhaps," she said with

some effort apparently. "But — you like him, Duke?"

"No."

I was about to add that I hated him. I checked myself, however. She looked at me curiously.

"It is as well, perhaps. He is your uncle's landlord—for great part of the farm. But, you are not equals, Duke. Your positions are widely different. You cannot associate with him on fair terms. It is not for me to judge him, or to speak disrespectfully of him. He is——" she hesitated.

"A nobleman," I said, rather bitterly.

"Yes. And you are—my son. There can be nothing in common between you."

"You know him, mother?"

"I have not seen him for many years." And she added, after a pause, "I never wish to see him more. Duke," she went on, resting her hand softly on my shoulder, "Lord Overbury is nothing—can be nothing to you. Avoid him."

"He will do me harm, you think?"

"Heaven forbid, my boy." She kissed me tenderly; there were tears in her eyes. "He must not come between us, Duke. He must never part us; promise me he shall not." I was amazed at her sudden emotion.

"Indeed, I don't wish to see his face again."

She wrung my hand.

Rosetta's name was on my tongue. It was on her account, I knew, that I had turned against Lord Overbury. For otherwise, surely, I had received but kindness at his hands. Mistaken kindness, it might be; yet well intentioned; could I doubt it?

I longed to speak of Rosetta, with a boy's garrulousness and fond craving for sympathy. It would have so eased my heart to have told something of what was troubling it, and to have given words to the vague suspicions and pains, regrets and yearnings, that were tossing and burning within me. They would have been more easily endured, it seemed to me, could I have given them shape and some definite substance by speaking of them. I could not. Rosetta! a rope-dancer! flying with Lord Overbury after but a few minutes' speech with him! How could I talk of such things to my mother? I had hidden little from her hitherto; but this revelation would seem insulting, monstrous, outrageous. She would certainly fail to understand me, would misjudge the matter terribly, suspect, rebuke me far more than I merited. She had not seen Rosetta. Perhaps she could never be brought

to see her with my eyes. She would misconceive her, think of her probably as Mauleverer, a far more lenient judge, had thought and spoken—no, I could not do it. Rosetta must remain a secret ; yet it was hard to hide from my mother a thing that seemed so vital to me.

She thought me only over-fatigued and nervously excited, probably, by experiences very new to me. I left her for a moment, in obedience to an established rule at the Down Farm, to visit the stables and make sure that my pony had been properly cared for. When I returned she had raked out the fire, and packed up her knitting.

I thought I had never before seen her looking so sad, enfeebled, and wan. But it was now past midnight, and she was perhaps tired out with waiting for my return.

I slept heavily for an hour or two, and then found myself starting up, restless on my bed, far too wakeful for further repose. I occupied myself, or was occupied in spite of myself, in going through, over and over again, each event of the day, down to the most minute particulars. All I had said and done, and my thoughts and feelings the while. All that had been said and done in my presence, and, conjecturally, the thoughts and feelings of those I

had encountered. And Rosetta, of course, engaged me incessantly. Or if, for a time, I seemed able to banish her from my mind, she was soon back there again, to the subjection of all other meditations. Her beauty, her graceful gestures, her glances, her words, all were present to me most vividly. And then came the terrible thought of her flight, of her unworthiness.

Again and again I persuaded myself that this could not be; that cruel injustice had been done her; that some unfortunate accident, capable of very simple explanation, had brought the most unfair suspicions upon her. Yet I had ever to begin anew this task of self-persuasion. Could I resist the judgment of her fellows of the booth? What had they thought? Mauleverer was no severe censor; he had been inclined to make excuses; he had expressed himself with reserve; yet could I question the conclusion at which he had arrived? Would he have joined Diavolo in the pursuit but that he felt some confidence as to the likely fate of Rosetta? He had known her longer and better, of course, than I did, who had seen her but for a few minutes. And though he had talked of finding her at Dripford on his return, he was clearly not hopeful on that score; he really believed

—there could be no doubt of it—that she had fled with Lord Overbury.

I was up early and about the farm, for I was too ill at ease to lie in my bed ; action of some kind seemed indispensable to me. I found my uncle limping with rheumatic pains in the farm-yard. The horses were being harnessed for the fields.

“Well, Duke, so you sold the lambs well, I hear,” he said to me, cheerily. “Glad to see you abroad so early.”

“I’m going on to Reube.”

“You’ll find him in the ten-acre bottom, just beyond the swedes.”

I hastened onward, anxious to avoid questioning about the fair.

Reube was hard at work, pitching hurdles for the stock sheep. He had resumed his every-day clothes. For him the chief event of the year was over. Thoughts of it and of the successful part he had played in it, cheered him still ; but it was not his way to waste time in brooding over the past. He prided himself on what he called his “vore-cast.” Probably in his mind’s eye, if he possessed such an organ, he had already in view the lambs of next season, the flocks of the future.

I inquired of him if he had been overtaken by

—if he had seen anything of—a post-chaise driven rapidly along the road from Dripford, on his way home?

“Not that I moind, Measter Duke. But there was a nation zight of carts and carriages on the road. Just about a lot of people. I dunno as I ever zaw more volks got together than there was at fair yesterday.”

“You saw nothing of Lord Overbury?”

“Eez, I zaw un at fair anighst the market-plaace, just avore I started whome. ‘Well, shepherd,’ a’ zays, ‘hast zold lambs?’ ‘Eez,’ I zays. ‘What price?’ a’ axes. ‘Trimming!’ I zays.”

“He was alone?”

“No, a’d a young ooman alongside un.”

“What like was she, Reube?”

“I just didn’t take pertickler notice, Measter Duke. ’Twarn’t for the likes of I to be pryin’ about his lordship. A’ zeemed a main sprack kind o’ wench, though. Not from these parts, as I knows on. I caan’t mind as I ever zet eyes on her avore, or should know her again if I was to zee her. There’s always a caddling lot of women gets aboot fair, zee, sir. Where um comes from, or where um goes to, there I can’t tell’ee. But um bain’t there for much good, most-like, I be thinking.”

“Was she tall or short?”

“There, I caan’t zay as to hecch (height) nor colour. A’ was young, I moind, and his lordship was laughin’ and talkin’ just as a’ always is. Main maggotty a’ zeemed, and dree parts vuddled; only ’taint for I to be zaying zo.”

I could gather nothing further from Reube, and so departed, idly to watch the ploughing in an adjoining field, my thoughts little concerned, however, in that operation. I saw the brown earth striped with lines of deeper brown as the bright coulter clove and upturned the soil. I listened to the ploughmen’s cries of direction to their teams of horses and oxen. “Ga oot!” “Coom hedder!” “There, right!” as the obedient cattle paced to and fro, furrowing the land with curious precision. But the while I was, in truth, thinking, dreaming of Rosetta.

In the afternoon, pleading some vague excuse, I know not what, I hurried out and rode hard as I could to Dripford.

Compared with yesterday, the town seemed dead; its inhabitants absent, or locked in slumber. Scarce a trace of the fair was discernible. The market-place was empty; there might almost have been grass growing in the streets. Sheep, shepherds, dogs, pens, hurdles, all were gone. The

booths, tents, shows, swings, and theatre, were no more to be seen.

There was not a soul in the coffee-room of the King's Head. Even the barmaids were absent from their post. A waiter could not be found.

It was with difficulty I roused a sleepy ostler in the stable. But I could obtain no information from him. He knew nothing of Lord Overbury; save that he had been in the town yesterday, and was not there to-day. No post-chaise, he asserted, had left the King's Head.

I could learn nothing, in fact.

"And the shows and theatres, when will they be here again?"

"This time next year, most like."

"And where are they gone? Where are they to be found meanwhile?"

"Lord knows!" he answered.

It was no affair of his. He turned away, and fell asleep again upon a truss of straw.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOST.

DID I love Rosetta? I fancied so; but I could not be sure. I was, as she had said, "a mere boy." What did I know of love? What, indeed, did I know of anything? I had studied some few books; but of life and the world I had scarcely read a page. I had been reared in absolute retirement. The little village of Purrington had been to me a universe. Steepleborough, and now Dripford, had been the furthest point of my wanderings from home. The expedition to the great sheep fair was the most memorable event in my career. And it had nearly turned my brain.

Before this how few of my fellow-men I had ever even seen! I could almost count upon my fingers the names of those with whom I had interchanged speech. And how few women! My mother, Kem, a dairymaid or two, the wives and

daughters of the farm servants who worked in the fields—there were not many to be added to this list. To be sure there were to be seen in Purring-ton Church on Sundays some be-ribboned bonnets and glaring shawls clothing the farmers' spouses of the neighbourhood, and the apple-cheeked, sloe-eyed, broad-nosed Miss Rawsons, who sometimes came over from the Lower Wick Farm at Bulborough to our afternoon service, and were thought by their friends, and by themselves, to be very fine-grown, comely, and attractive young women. With these I had certainly conversed now and then, but not often, and always without interest, and upon indifferent topics—chiefly, perhaps, as to the state of the weather, the thriving of Mr. Rawson's crops, or the condition of his sheep. I could find little else to say to them. I thought them good-natured and lively; but boisterous and a trifle vulgar. My mother, I remember, was always critical as to their style of dress, which she judged unbecoming and extravagant for their position in life. For the Lower Wick was but a small farm; Mr. Rawson was said to have been originally a "pig jobber," and was undoubtedly a rough and uncultivated person.

No. The Miss Rawsons, for all the glare of

their finery and the flashing of their round open eyes, were nothing to me. But Rosetta! She was as a new revelation. The thought of her—the utterance of her name, audible but to myself—sent a strange thrill through me—set my heart beating, my cheeks blushing, my blood coursing and dancing through my veins with most exciting rapidity.

But if I indeed loved her it was with a boy's love: a nebulous poetic fondness that could assume no distinctness of shape or find certainty of expression; that was, nevertheless, content with its own vagueness; that did not aspire to possession, but was so largely leavened with reverence that it craved only for liberty to adore humbly, abjectly, at the feet of its idol. It was, at this time, my crowning wish to see her again—only to see her, for however brief a span, and feed anew my excess of admiration. It was all foolish and absurd enough, very likely. But, at least, my boyish passion was instinct with a boy's purity and spirit of self-sacrifice.

It was strange that with all my extravagance on this head—and it is, I think, a sort of tribute, so far, to its genuineness and integrity—that I never once concealed from myself, or strove to conceal, the wretched circumstances attending my first meeting with Rosetta, and marking her life, con-

dition, and aspect. As it seems to me, I recognised fully all these disenchantments, and yet remained in spite of them wholly enchanted. I was at once sane and insane. She was to me an angel; and yet a rope-dancer too. She was exquisitely beautiful; yet her cheeks were roughly stained with paint, her dress miserable in its tawdriness. When I thought of her, as I did incessantly, and conjured up from memory a vision of her as I had first seen her—and this I seemed for ever doing—she appeared to me at once lovely and squalid. While I dwelt upon her wondrous charms of glance and expression, and form and colour, I could yet note, not less certainly, her soiled dancer's dress: her tarnished spangles, shabby ribbons, and frayed sandals. I could admit that her speech to me had been abrupt even to rudeness; that her manner had lacked refinement; that her life had been without doubt rough and wretched enough; that her calling had entailed upon her a thousand degradations that could not but blemish her nature, and destroy her self-respect. She was probably uncultivated, illiterate; skilled in nothing but the poor art she professed; was content to win applause from the most despicable of crowds. Yet seeing, knowing all this, I loved her. Her grace and beauty overcame and

possessed me absolutely. I viewed her with a supreme tenderness and pity that subdued and absorbed all attendant considerations, however forcibly they might be presented to me by myself or by others.

But, indeed, there was no one to speak to me about her, there was no one to whom I could speak. My love was my secret, unguessed, assuredly, by its object, known to myself alone. It was at this period I produced my first verses: love and Rosetta being of course their theme and burden. My first verses! I content myself with recording the fact. I have looked at them since, years and years after they were written. I read them with amazement. Yet, at the time, how veritable and sterling seemed their fervour!

I was unhappy, yet, somehow, pleased at being unhappy, proud of my passion, not dissatisfied at hearing that I looked pale and worn. There was even a sort of comfort in studying my image in the glass, and assuring myself of this fact—*young idiot that I was!*

I had seen nothing more of Rosetta; I could learn no tidings of her. I went long distances, almost to the foundering of my pony, to various fairs and rural festivals in the county, and searched

and inquired for her in booths and shows of all kinds. But without avail. Indeed, while doing this I felt that it was futile. She was lost to me. I should never see her more.

Again and again I visited the lodge of Overbury Hall, and cross-questioned old Thacker as to the proceedings of his lordship. I learnt nothing. Old Thacker could tell me nothing; he had indeed nothing to tell. It seemed quite certain that Lord Overbury had not been near the Hall for a long time past.

Once a ray of hope did, for a moment, illumine my despair. The time for Lockport races had come round again. On the platform of a booth just outside the course, I felt assured that I recognised Mauleverer. He was parading round and round in front of a travelling theatre with other performers variously dressed. But he no longer played the part of a clown. He wore flowing robes, a majestic beard; a tinselled crown circled his brows. He was a king.

I hurriedly mounted to the platform and spoke to him; he knew me at once. He looked old and dejected, I thought; the lines in his face had deepened much, his cheeks were pendulous, and his voice had lost its old round-toned quality; he now

spoke with difficulty, and in a harsh husky whisper. He expressed great joy at meeting me, while deploring the evil fortune that still attended his professional exertions.

"I'm not the man I was," he said; "but still this isn't quite the thing, is it? for me—for me of all people! I hope still for better days; but I don't know—I grow old. I can't afford to wait much longer. The tide's been too long turning. And I've caught cold sitting on the bank watching for change. It's my luck. My cough? Chronic asthma they call it. At times I can shout with the best of them—louder, and to more effect. For I was an elocutionist, if there ever was one, of the best school. Then comes my cough again, and I'm—as you find me. So I'm cast for heavy business now; and I try to make hoarseness pass for suppressed emotion. It's all I can do. Cold, from exposure, and perhaps want. Ah, Master Duke, how often I've thought of the victuals of the Down Farm. All well there? That's right. Real victuals they were. Yes. I'm still among the boothers. But not clown now. Hush. Not a word of that. It's not generally known. Loss of dignity in our profession is loss of money. And loss of money is hunger, and thirst, and—asthma. You were saying——"

I had tried to interject a question as to Rosetta. But I broke down.

"Diavolo," I said. "Where is he?"

"Dead," replied Mauleverer. "What? You've not heard of it? It made some noise too. He was trying the high jeff—the high rope, you know—and he wasn't sober. To do him justice he seldom was. And he fell heavily. They picked him up—dead. Internal injuries, the doctor said. Exit Diavolo. He was not a nice man. Yet he had been first-rate in his own line; an inferior business when all's said; but he knew it all thoroughly, and could do it all, taken at his best, beyond any one I ever saw in that way of life. You remember meeting us that night as we drove back to Dripford?"

I could now fairly inquire about Rosetta. Mauleverer shook his head.

"From that day to this, I've never seen her, nor heard a word of or from her. I thought she might have written a line to Mrs. Jecker, who'd been kind to her; but she didn't—women are not grateful generally. Afraid of Diavolo? Perhaps so. A clever little girl; but there, she's gone."

"And you can't think what's become of her?"

"Perhaps. But where's the use? I don't know."

"But you think she went away with——"

"Don't you?" he asked quickly. "But it isn't our business, is it?"

"If I could only find her, Mauleverer: if I could only see her again!"


He was silent, looking at me with a curious blending of wonder and pity.

"You're still a young farmer," he said, after a while. Then he added, noting I suppose my depressed air: "Come, don't *you* be chapfallen. Leave that to me and others. You've life and the world before you. Fortune hasn't yet been hard upon you. Think how she's served me! And I was your age once. Make better use of your time than I have done. And never fret. I don't. Though Heaven knows I've cause."

He wrung my hand. He was summoned to enter the booth and take part in the performance.

"For the tight-rope girl, you'll laugh about her some day. Don't be angry; I don't mean immediately."

Laugh about Rosetta! I *was* angry. He apologised profusely, and I could not but be appeased. Then he drew me aside, and, in a hurried whisper, implored a loan. I emptied my purse into his hand.




"Shall I pass you into the boxes?" he asked. Poor Mauleverer!

I quitted the race-course hurriedly, without even waiting to see the Lockport Cup run for, although the race for the Lockport Cup was the chief "turf" event of our country side. And the favourite, indeed, had been trained within a few miles of Purrington, and much anxiety prevailed thereabout as to his success.

No wonder that when I met Farmer Jobling on my way home—he had been to a sale of farming stock at Denton—and could not answer his question as to the winner of the race, he thought "that boy of Mrs. Nightingale's" stark mad, or a born fool, he could not quite decide which. So I afterwards learnt he had expressed himself in my regard to certain of his neighbours, who kindly made speed to publish his opinion.

That I was the occasion of much perplexity and distress to my mother and my uncle I could not doubt. They forebore to question me; waiting probably for explanation to come from me. We seemed all strangely silent, indeed, at the Down Farm. There was division amongst us of a new kind. If a certain lack of sympathy ever existed between us, and there were times perhaps when

this was really the case, it now seemed curiously increased and intensified. They failed, as it was natural enough they should fail, to understand me; how then could they sympathise with me? There was no shortcoming in their kindness to me; this perhaps was rather augmented than otherwise. But they viewed me somewhat as a patient, suffering from some undefined malady, that was alike beyond their skill to heal or their power to comprehend. And they watched me; affectionately, and yet with an anxiety that had its elements, as it seemed to me, of suspicion and distrust. They watched me, the while they seemed unconscious of so doing, or busily sought to conceal the intenseness of their regard. Often I noted my uncle's cold inquiring eyes steadfastly fixed upon me, while his face wore a baffled and bewildered expression. Then, finding that he was in his turn observed, he would with a start endeavour to concern himself with some indifferent subject, speaking at random or permitting his snuff-box to engross his attention. My mother, too, scrutinised me not less persistently, saying little the while. Once, however, having convinced herself that I was really ill, she adjured me urgently to seek the aid of Doctor Turton of Steepleborough.



It was with difficulty I could avoid submitting myself for cure of my troubled heart to the hands of that practitioner, our nearest medical man.

My failure as a farmer, too, became very apparent. I was conscious that in my character as "the young squire," I exhibited myself to signal disadvantage. I went to and fro, hither and thither, about the fields and among the labouring people, but I did little more than make manifest my deficiencies. I felt that I knew nothing, that I learned nothing. My uncle had reason enough to be dissatisfied with me—to charge me with taking no interest in my occupation; with neglecting the opportunities afforded me for improving myself. Yet, if he reproached me, it was more by his looks than his words.

"You remember what we had last year in that fifteen-acre field yonder, beside the firs?" he asked me one day, testing me.

"Vetches," I answered at random.

"No, no, Duke, you forget," he said, with a disappointed air. "Barley; some of the best barley I ever sent to market. There was none finer in the whole county. It's in clover now; and a very fine crop. What do you think I ought to do with it for next year?"

"Swedes," I suggested.

"No, no; wheat, and then swedes, perhaps, and then barley again; that's considered a very good honest course. Fair to the land, to the landlord, and to the farmer. It's what they call the Norfolk course, and Norfolk farming's thought highly of. You should try and recollect these things."

I did try, yet somehow I failed.

It was a very hard winter that year, I remember. The spring seemed never coming. There had been a long continuance of severe frost and biting winds, with heavy falls of snow. It was an anxious time for all our farmers and flock-masters; the poor sheep suffered severely. The ponds were all frozen; the roads were impassable almost. Reube was at his folds day and night. His devotion to his duty, to his master's interests, knew no bounds; he fought against the elements with exceeding gallantry. The fainting ewes had oftentimes to be dug bodily out of deep snow-drifts; the new-born lambs entered upon life under most trying conditions, found themselves occupants of a very hard and bleak world indeed. Death decimated the flock. Poor Reube was in despair. Oftentimes I found him stripping off his coat to wrap it round his infant

lambs ; shivering in his shirt-sleeves himself, yet content if they could but be kept warm and alive. It was ludicrous, perhaps, yet it was, in its way, genuine heroism. No mother could have lavished more care and tenderness upon her baby children. He was content and comforted in that his pains and zeal were not wholly unavailing ; and he took pride in some specific of his own devising, composed, I think, of warm milk and gin, with which he freely dosed his ailing young charges in their earliest stages of animation. We lost fewer lambs than any of our neighbours, although that was not saying very much.

My uncle was gratified that I did all in my power to assist the shepherd, that I was with him early and late, relieving him of some labour, and oftentimes taking his place as night-watcher by the fold. The fact was that I had need of occupation and excitement of any sort ; that I slept but ill, that it was a relief and satisfaction to be about doing something—anything.

It was late in the afternoon. A frosty sunset lent a rosy flush to the snow-laden landscape. There stretched out before me a vast sea of dazzling white waves and tender purple-grey shadows. I was warmly wrapped in a shepherd's coat, wandering

I scarcely knew whither, idly noting the strange wintry beauty of the scene; the snow crunching noisily under my heavy boots, my devious track marked upon the down by deep indentations. I was advancing towards the fir plantation, lured by the sight of the whitened trees, each branch and leaf sustaining its feathery load of snow, as though it had been a trophy or a prize; or bent on watching the rays of the sinking sun glancing among the boughs in ruddy arrows of misty light.

Suddenly—could it be?—I perceived a figure in the plantation. A woman seated upon a pile of fallen fir trunks, crouching, covering her face with her hands. I was within a few paces of her before she stirred. Then she looked up. I almost screamed in my amazement.

It was Rosetta!

CHAPTER XX.

FOUND.

I COULD not be mistaken, although it was certain that she did not recognise me. Our eyes met, but she only glanced at me in a vacant, listless way. She had been crying, it appeared ; rocking herself to and fro, as she gathered closely about her a long fur-trimmed mantle of black velvet streaked and soiled here and there by trailing through the snow. Her hands were bare, I noticed, and swollen and blue from the cold. There were jewels upon her fingers, and a rich gold bracelet clasped her wrist. She had drawn the hood of her cloak over her head, and held to her mouth a filmy lace-bordered handkerchief which she was biting and tearing with her teeth. For a moment or two I stood silent and amazed, contemplating her.

“Why are you here?” I asked at length, faintly, scarcely knowing what I said.

"Why should I not be here?" she answered, with lowered brows and angry, gleaming eyes.

"But you will die of cold."

"Well, and why not? As well here as elsewhere; as well of cold as of anything else. But it *is* cold, bitter, cruel cold. The wind cuts and stabs like a knife." Then in a changed voice she asked, "How far is it from here to Overbury Hall?"

"About three miles across the down."

"Not more? You're sure? I thought I'd come miles and miles. Ugh!" She shivered, and folding her cloak round her shoulders left her feet uncovered. I observed that her shoes were thin, and wet through. I was much distressed.

"Rosetta!" I cried.

She started. An expression of fear crossed her face.

"What! You know me! Who are you, then? A shepherd? Well, go and look after your sheep—I'm not one of them." And she laughed almost savagely.

"I am not a shepherd. You have forgotten me, it seems—Duke Nightingale."

But it was plain the name conveyed no meaning to her, that she did not know me.

"Duke Nightingale," she repeated, pressing her hand upon her forehead.

"I saw you at Dripford, at the fair, some months back. You were dancing in a tent. Surely you remember?"

"What! You were there? With *him*? Ah, I think I do recollect something about it now. So, you were the boy that came with him? But what of it? Are you his servant—his spy? Why have you tracked me here?"

"I live close by, at the farm-house in the hollow yonder."

"You have not followed me then? Is that what you mean? It was mere chance brought you here?"

"It was mere chance."

"Well, you've seen me, you've found me. Now go."

"I cannot leave you here. Night is coming on. You will die of cold if you remain here."

"I'm only resting. I shall go on presently. Where? God only knows! Out of the world, perhaps. I don't care where. Oh, if it wasn't so cold! My fingers ache, my teeth chatter, my heart seems breaking, my feet are like stones. Am I dying, do you think?"

"Impossible! Heaven forbid! No, Rosetta, it shall not be."

"Why do you speak to me like that? How strange of you! What am I to you?"

"Indeed, indeed, you are very much to me, Rosetta."

"You have got my name pat enough, it seems," she said with a wild, scornful laugh.

"I was not likely to forget it, or you, Rosetta. You cannot know, you cannot guess, what joy it is to me to see you once more."

"You've a kind voice," she said, after a pause. "And you mean kindly, I think. But you never saw me but once, and then only for a few minutes. And you've thought of me since—often? very often?"

"Indeed Rosetta, I have never ceased to think of you."

"How strange all this sounds. You're not mad, are you? But you couldn't know, if you were. It's no use asking that. So you saw me dance at the fair, and have thought of me ever since? Yes, I remember all now. And you saw Diavolo cane me, the wretch. He's dead since. So I've heard. I can't but hope it's true. It's wrong to hope that, I suppose. Somehow everything one does is wrong,

according to some people. They haven't been beaten by him as I have. I hated him. He was a cruel, savage monster, and I was so helpless in his hands—a child and his apprentice. Not that he was worse to me than to the others, poor little wretches that we were. For father and mother I had none that ever I heard of. So I was at his mercy. And he half-starved me, and took all my earnings. But that's over now. And he's dead. He broke his neck they told me. It little matters now. All's past and gone. I've left that life behind me—exchanged it for what? This! A pretty change. Oh, this bitter wind! It cuts me to pieces.”

She swayed to and fro as she talked in this wandering, fragmentary way, scarce knowing, as I judged, what she said. Her eyes were closing, and she appeared half fainting from the intense cold. Suddenly she bowed her head, and was falling asleep in the snow. I knew the danger of this, and grew much alarmed. Happily I carried with me a small flask of brandy. I applied it to her lips, and constrained her to swallow some few drops. I took off my heavy coat, and wrapped it round her. I chafed her hands, breathing upon them to warm them. I folded my arms round her, and drew her close to me. Presently she revived a little.

"How kind you are to me," she murmured, dreamily. "You're a good boy, I'm sure, Duke Nightingale! Yes, I know the name now. God bless you, Duke. Kiss me. How warm your face is. And smooth as a woman's. It quite burns my cheeks. I was so cold and wretched; but I'm better now. I should have died, I'm sure, but for you. Not that I cared; I wanted to die, I think. But the cold was dreadful. And you've thought of me often? How strange that seems. For what was I to you? A girl dancing in a booth. That's all. Though I danced well, I know; and could still, if I haven't forgot it all. I hated the life. I felt that I could, and should, have been doing better. Plenty of talent has come out of booths—why not in my case as in another's? But I had no chance. I was a slave to a cruel master. I had only to obey his bidding, and was beaten when I refused. How weary, weary I grew of it! So I escaped at last. You know that, I suppose? It was the day you saw me at the fair."

"And you escaped alone?"

"No; not alone. How could I? With *him*."

"With Lord Overbury?" I asked, faintly, after a pause. My heart was throbbing cruelly.

"With Lord Overbury."

It was true, then. I felt, I knew it must be so. And yet it pained me grievously, unspeakably, to learn the fact for certain from her lips. I was silent, longing for some look upon her face of sorrow, of shame, of penitence. I saw none. She only shivered and looked about her with fatigued, half-closed eyes.

"Diavolo followed me, did you know that, to take me back?"

"Yes, Diavolo, with Mauleverer."

"Mauleverer? Oh, you mean the clown. Mauleverer? That wasn't the name, I think. But it doesn't matter. We've so many names, and change them so often. Yes, Mauleverer, as you call him. I remember. He was a good fellow that, I think. I liked him. He was a little crazy, wasn't he? But he was kind to me. He had always a friendly word for me. And he tried often to keep Diavolo's cane from me. It wasn't much use, for how could he hinder Diavolo? He couldn't, you know. So he followed, too, did he, with Diavolo, to bring me back? It was no business of his. Why should he care what became of me? Why did he try to take me back?"

I could not answer. I was too much distressed

and perplexed. And what was to be done? I asked myself.

"I would have died sooner than go back. I had a knife with me. I would have used it had they laid a finger upon me. I was free at last. There was no going back for me. And they couldn't overtake us. He knew all the country, and turned off somewhere at a by-road. And then we went north. It was a long, dreary journey, I remember; and now I'm back in this part of the world. Is it far from here to—what's the place where the fair was? ah, Dripford—that's it. How many miles?

I told her how many. She had raised herself with difficulty, moving stiffly, as though her limbs were half frozen. With a tremulous hand she shaded her eyes, dazzled by the snow; glanced at the bleak landscape about her, and shuddered. The sun was now fast sinking into a coppery bank of snow-charged clouds behind Beacon Mount. The parting rays touched as with fire the gilt vane of Purrington Church in the distance, and tinged with rose-red the tree-tops of the leafless woodlands surrounding and shrouding Overbury Hall.

"I must try and get on somehow," she said, feebly.

"Where are you going?"

"Anywhere but back there." She pointed in the direction of the great house.

"You have come from the Hall?"

"From where else, do you suppose? I didn't drop from the sky. Did you think I did?"

It seemed not impossible. It was so strange that she should be where she was; and she was so beautiful, and my admiration for her was so extreme; for the moment it had outstripped and almost quelled my love. Not because a conviction was growing upon me, as it well might do, of her unworthiness. Not appreciably on that account. But I stood in her presence; my heart had lost its boldness. I was all reverence, and trembling devotion. Besides, I had to think, to the disturbance of my wild fondness, what was to be done next. The matter was becoming urgent.

"How wretchedly tired and weak I feel," she said; "and I thought I was so strong. What a fool I am! No, I can't go on yet. I must rest here a little while longer. If you would only let me go to sleep for half an hour, I feel I should wake up quite well and strong again."

"Impossible, Rosetta; it must not be; it will be certain death to you."

"And if it is, what does it matter? Who will care?"

"I shall. Indeed, indeed, Rosetta, it would break my heart," I cried, desperately.

"You! Your heart! What! You love me?"

I know not what I said in answer; but there was no need of words; my face sufficiently revealed the story of my passion.

"My poor boy!" She looked at me with curious tenderness, and a sort of wondering compassion. This softened expression rendered her in my eyes more lovely than ever. I clasped her cold hands in mine. She withdrew them abruptly, pressing them against her forehead.

"How strange! How mad! *You love me!* Me of all people!" Then presently she added, "No, no, it must not be. There must be no more of this. Let me go. I can walk now."

"You will go back to the Hall—to him?" A fierce jealousy burned within me. I grew bolder now, for all was told and known, by some desperate chance as it seemed. She had seen into my heart.

"No, not there—not to him." But she spoke less firmly than before.

"Rosetta, you love Lord Overbury?"

"I!" It was uttered in a kind of scream.

"He was to me escape, that was all; and now——"
 she paused, tossing her head in imperious anger.

"And now——"

"I hate him!"

I fell at her feet. My heart found words—
 frantic words enough, very likely. I cannot now
 recall them; yet they were intelligible—could not be
 misread. I said, at least I know I strove to say,
 that I loved her, that I should love her always;
 that she was dearer to me than anything in this
 world. That the thought of her, the memory of
 her, was ever with me. That she was part of my
 very being, of myself. That she was my life, my
 soul. That I adored her, that I devoted myself to
 her, and to her service thenceforward and for ever.
 And much more to the same effect, expressed with
 all the iteration and diffuseness customary with
 passion large or short lived, but for the time fervid
 and thorough.

She listened, amazed and bewildered, and yet, I

think, pleased too.

"I have never been spoken to like this before,"
 she said, half smiling, softly and simply. She
 stooped down, and gently kissed me on the fore-
 head. "But you mustn't say such things to me."
 She was turning from me. I caught her cloak,

and sought to detain her. She snatched it from me, and was hurrying away through the firs.

Suddenly she slipped in the snow and fell.

When I came up to where she was lying, I found that she had fainted. What was I to do? I raised her from the ground, and, sustaining her with one hand, tried with the other to beat from her dress the thick snow that clung to it. How deadly pale she was! Was she hurt?

CHAPTER XXI.

MY MOTHER AND ROSETTA.

It was plain to me that I must somehow convey her to the Down Farm House. There at least she would obtain the shelter and succour she needed so pressingly. It was some little distance, however, and my strength was scarcely equal to carrying her. Should I leave her, and run back home for assistance? But she might perish in my absence. Or—and the thoughts roused within me a feeling of cruel fear and miserable jealousy—she might revive suddenly and escape from me, proceed on her way, and vanish—I might see her no more. No, I could not quit her side, if I remained but to die with her. I shouted for help until my voice died away into a feeble, almost voiceless murmur. There was just a chance that one of the farm servants being at work might hear me. But there came no answer to my cries, and I was alone among the firs, as they creaked

beneath the weight of snow they bore upon their branches, and now and then a rustling sound, as, stirred by my clamours, the drifts yielded a little, and feathery flakes crumbled from their crests and fell in powdery showers.

Her face—how beautiful still! like a sleeping child's—was marble white and cold. I pressed it against my own, I kissed it, to instil some life and warmth into it. For me, my blood was on fire. My forehead was wet; I was trembling all over with feverish excitement. It was not winter to me, but a fierce summer of passion and wild emotion. Was she dead? What an agony the thought inflicted upon me! No; she still lived. Warm breath still issued, however faintly, from her pallid lips. I could note it wreathing and curling, in a thin cloud, in the frosty air.

My sweet Rosetta! And I was holding her clasped, how tenderly! in my arms. The thought was most precious to me—of that I could not be deprived, even though death were to come then at once to her, to both of us.

But this was madness. I roused myself. By an effort I constrained my thoughts to resume something like a rational form. I must save her; yet what to do? I again applied my flask to her

lips. She shivered, then unclosed her eyes, and revived a little.

“You’re not hurt, Rosetta?”

She did not speak, but she faintly shook her head. She weighed heavily upon my arm; as yet she had not strength to stand.

Presently, part carrying, part dragging her, I moved her some way towards the farm. The snow was deep, and my feet seemed often slipping from under me. I was compelled to pause every now and then, both for Rosetta’s sake and my own. At intervals I shouted for help, but unavailingly. And I was careful to wrap my thick coat about her as closely as I could. I even meditated taking off my heavy boots, and constraining Rosetta to wear them. I was grieved to think how cold and wet her poor feet must be in the thin soaked shoes she wore. I would willingly have gone barefooted myself to have spared her any suffering. But I felt that the task was too difficult, she being so helpless, and that much valuable time would be lost. It seemed more advisable to hurry on as rapidly as possible. But we made slow progress. I was in despair. I had blundered somewhat on my way back, missing, in my trouble and excitement, the foot-track to the plantation. We had come

upon deeper snow and heavier drifts. Still there was no chance of losing our way. Darkness was fast coming over; there was now but a dull kind of bloom discernible in the cloudy west, marking where the sun had gone down. But, thank Heaven, the roof-tops of the farm-house were now in sight.

"How good you are to me! But I tire you dreadfully. My dear Duke, you will kill yourself slaving for me," she moaned. "Better leave me, and go on alone."

"I'll die sooner."

"My Duke, I love you." And she hid her face on my shoulder. She scarce knew what she said, probably. But her words inspired me with new courage, with unexpected strength. I lifted her in my arms, and succeeded in carrying her some hundred yards or so, though my limbs trembled under me, the hold of my feet upon the snow was so precarious.

There was help at last. A figure could be seen in the distance. It was Kem.

"Kem!" I cried to her.

She was making her way laboriously through the snow, searching for something, as it seemed. She was in quest, as I afterwards learned, of a blue pyle hen, her favourite amongst the poultry,

that was missing, and had, as she feared, met with serious misadventure.

"Kem!" I shouted again and again. She looked every way but in the right one, as somehow people always will do when cried to and urgently needed. She was even retracing her steps and going back homeward at one moment. But she perceived me at last, and stood still. She could with difficulty understand that I wished her to approach. Then she hurried up.

"Help me," I said. "A lady lost in the snow. We must carry her home."

"Lost! Poor soul! And shrammed with the cold. 'Twill be her death like enough. And such a pretty creature too! And her poor hands and arms all spreazed. What did she out in such weather?"

Kem lent willing and substantial help. Soon Rosetta was carried to the farm, and reclining in front of the kitchen fire. She had revived, drawing life, as it were, from its warmth. She spoke but little, and was languid and weary. But her face now wore a look of repose, almost of happiness. At her own request she had been supplied with some tea; but she could eat nothing. I pressed her hand—she rewarded me with a kind and grate-

ful smile—and left her in charge of Kem, who was soon busy drying the poor child's clothes. Warm slippers had been found for her, and the snow shaken from her mantle. She wore beneath it a rich dress of light green silk decked with much costly trimming of lace. A heavy gold chain was twisted about her neck, and jewels hung from her ears.

"A real lady I'd say by her donnings," whispered Kem. "But how come she out in snow? Well nigh froar to death she were. Who is she, Master Duke, and what? Dost know?"

I made no answer. Yet it was clear that some explanation upon the subject I must afford sooner or later.

Who was she, and what? To me she was Rosetta; that answer was sufficient. But more must be said than that to my uncle—to my mother. The secret of my love was in peril. How would they judge it? And Rosetta. What opinion would they form of her? I shrunk from the subject, yet I felt that I must meet it.

They would condemn her. So much seemed certain. They would not, they could not, find the excuses for her that I did—in her youth and wondrous beauty, in the cruel sufferings she had en-

dured, the hard life, the savage schooling, the miserable companionship. They would put these far from them, and demand what was she now? It was hard to answer, painful to think upon.

And did I not myself, in truth, condemn her? If I did not, it was because I wilfully shrank from considering the subject; because out of moral cowardice I refused to let my mind dwell upon it; because of my love, or what was then even more absorbing than my love, my excessive pity. No. I could not condemn her; I preferred to slink away from the judgment seat. I was not competent; I was too weak, too erring, too fond, to occupy it and censure the sins of one so fair to look upon.

I suspect my uncle resolved to confess all to him: my first meeting with Rosetta, my insensate passion for her, and the sequel: her flight with Lord Chremery, and now, her escape from the Hall, and my finding her in the snow. I meant to appeal to his compassion, and, above all, to conjure him to deal kindly with the poor stranger whom what he had brought within his gates. But my uncle was absent from the house. I heard him was out in the water meadows superintending the breaking up of the ice for the cattle.

To my mother I found it impossible to tell all that I had promised myself, perhaps vainly, to reveal to my uncle. I simply informed her, in a confused statement, that I had chanced to meet a lady lost in the snow, and had with difficulty brought her home for shelter. I said little beyond this.

"Who is she, Duke? A stranger?"

"She knows little of this country, I think," I answered evasively.

"You've seen her before? Nay, it matters not; if help is needed it shall be given, though she be the veriest tramp., Lost in the snow! Poor soul, she might have died. Thank God you found her. Where is she? In the kitchen?"

"Yes, before the fire; I told Kem to do all that needed to be done."

"That's right; I can trust Kem. Poor woman! Thank God you found her, Duke," she said again. Then she added: "If you're wet be sure you change your clothes. I'll see to this lost creature myself."

Lost creature! That was how she spoke of Rosetta, never having seen her, wholly uninformed of her story. If she were to know all!

She had been sitting at her desk, busy over the account-books of the farm. She closed them at

once, locked her desk, and hurried to the kitchen. It was some time before I found courage to follow her. With a tremulous heart I asked myself what would she think of Rosetta? What would she say to her? Could her surpassing beauty fail to impress and fascinate others as it did me? I was cowardly enough to open the parlour door and listen, in the hope of hearing something of what was passing in the kitchen. There was the confused sound of conversation, in subdued tones, but I could overhear nothing distinctly, though I could note that now Rosetta was speaking and now my mother. I would not enter to disturb them yet, I thought. So I stood idly by the fire, staring at the coals, or out of the window into the darkness, or studying the pictures and books, and the other familiar objects of the room. But all in a vacant, preoccupied way, terribly nervous and disturbed the while.

At last I could bear the suspense no longer. With assumed boldness, noisy tread, and an affectation of a cough to announce my coming, I entered the kitchen.

Kem was standing apart, occupied, or pretending to be occupied, at the dresser. Rosetta reclined before the fire, resting her feet upon the

fender. Her cheeks were now aglow with colour, and she was holding up one of her jewelled hands to screen her face from the glare of the flames. She looked very handsome, the fitful firelight touching with bright reflections her lustrous auburn hair, gleaming upon the glossy folds of her silken skirts, and kindling sparkles upon the gold chain round her neck, her rings and bracelets, and the jewels she wore in the ears. She had thoroughly recovered, as it seemed. My mother stood near, with one hand resting upon the table. There was something of wonder and admiration in her face, as though she, too, had recognised the extreme beauty of her guest, and, mixed with this, earnest commiseration; and yet in addition, as I read it, an element of doubt and misgiving.

“Pray understand that I am most grateful for all the kindness that you have shown to me.”

Rosetta was speaking. I was struck at once by a certain change in her tone and manner; both were new to me.

“It is little enough—it is nothing,” my mother said, quietly.

“But for the assistance of your son—that is so, I think? But for the assistance of your son I should have died of the cold.”

"The winter has been very severe, and this heavy fall of snow makes the country dangerous to those who quit the roads; and even the roads in many places are, I learn, almost impassable. My son is happy, as we are all, that he was able to render you any help. But he would have done the same, I'm sure, as we all should, for any one in like trouble. He did no more than his duty."

"I am, as I said, most grateful, and if I can repay him or you in any way it will give me much pleasure."

She spoke, not with the lassitude of recent suffering or abated strength, but with a certain languid condescension that had something almost insolent about it. Of my presence in the room none took heed. My mother's pale face flushed.

"There is no need to speak or to think of repayment. To all we have done, or can do for you—it's little enough—you are most welcome."

"May I not even thank you when I owe you my life?" But this was said with a scornful curl of the lip and a peculiar bitterness of tone. It seemed marked by mock gratitude as well as mock humility. I was puzzled and distressed.

Why, I asked myself, did these two, my mother and Rosetta, stand thus apart and unsympathetic

on the instant of their first encounter? Why did Rosetta assume this new air of laboured arrogance and affected superiority? Why was my mother so cold to her, so anxious to escape her gratitude? What had passed between them prior to my entrance? Nothing of any real import, surely. I wholly failed to grasp the significance of their bearing towards each other—only that it was plain that some sudden antagonism had arisen between them, sundering them.

Are women possessed of some subtle gift of perception—some instinct, as it were, that enables them to read each other better than men can do? to detect frailties, to lay bare falsities, to discern the innermost secrets and infirmities of character, however hidden these may be to our ruder faculties of observation? I thought it must be so when I noted the look in my mother's face as she surveyed Rosetta.

"If you have indeed been in peril," she said, almost coldly, "thank Heaven for your deliverance."

Rosetta tossed her head disdainfully. I felt pained—I hardly knew why. But I regretted my mother's severity of demeanour, for which it seemed to me there was little real occasion; she might, I

judged, have been more indulgent and forbearing, considering all the circumstances; and I had the sense to perceive that Rosetta's manner was open to objection. I was at a loss to account for this new waywardness of hers. It was unlike herself, so far as I knew her, and that, in truth, was not much. But it appeared as though some histrionic impulse had suddenly moved her, and that she was playing a part, and a part that was to me distasteful, for it was deficient in the respect due to my mother. Still I made excuses for her. At such a time, seeing all she had gone through, how weak she was, I could not hold her accountable for what she did or said. And then I loved her.

She did not once look towards me. Yet I felt that she knew I was present.

"I will trespass upon your kindness but a few moments longer," she said with careless haughtiness. "I have no desire to tax your hospitality more than I can avoid. I may not, it seems, speak of my gratitude, or of compensating you for the trouble I have occasioned. Still I may perhaps be allowed some day to show my sense of the favours I have received at your hands."

She drew her skirts about her with superb insolence.

"I am glad if we have served you. But we had failed in Chistian charity had we done less than we have done. You will stay here, I trust, until you are well rested and strong enough to set forth again upon your way. Until then you will find a home beneath this roof. It is not much I offer you ; but at such a time, in such a case, I would not offer less to the poorest and wretchedest of outcasts. In this weather I could scarcely turn even a wolf from the door."

Rosetta rose angrily. "Woman!" she cried. "Do you know to whom you speak?"

"Rosetta!" I interposed, appealingly.

My mother's eyes met mine.

"Hush, Duke," she said ; and she laid her hand gently on my arm.

"Rosetta, indeed ! I am Lady Overbury !" and she glanced fiercely round her. Even at that trying moment I could but note the beauty of her anger, the grand kindling of her eyes, the thrilling music of her voice. I turned again to my mother.

She was startled, pale, and trembling somewhat, but she still stood erect ; she even removed her hand from the table, as though to show that she had no need of support.

"Your ladyship is welcome to the Down Farm," she said, gravely.

After a pause, Rosetta advanced towards her.

"You doubt me? I am Lord Overbury's wedded wife—married to him in Scotland months since. This will prove it."

She drew from her bosom a folded scrap of paper, and tossed it on to the table.

"There is no need of proof," said my mother. "Take back the paper. It concerns me not. As I said, you are welcome to the Down Farm. I should say, your ladyship is welcome."

Intentional or not, there was a suggestion almost of irony in her tone as she said this. Certainly it was but a cold and uncordial welcome.



CHAPTER XXII.

HER LADYSHIP.

ROSETTA abruptly resumed possession of the folded paper, the proof, as she had alleged, of her marriage with Lord Overbury. How strange and unaccountable it all seemed! I was speechless, motionless with surprise.

“Let me pass,” she said, “I’ll not remain here a moment longer.”

My mother interposed.

“Pardon me. Your ladyship forgets, I think, that it is now night, and bitter cold, the snow deep, the way very dangerous. It were safer, better, surely, to remain here—at least until the morning. You have endured much already.”

My mother’s staid manner and sober speech—she was really troubled and excited, I was certain, but she had great power of self-control—appeared to irritate Rosetta greatly.

"I'll go hence," she said sharply. "I'll not stay here to be insulted."

"You mistake, indeed. There is no intention to insult you. I have bidden you welcome. Our poor house is much at your ladyship's service. My brother, Mr. Orme, is, in part, a tenant of Lord Overbury's. We are bound, therefore, if only on that account, to do all we may on behalf of Lord Overbury's lady."

My mother spoke with an old-fashioned formality and precision; and there was no appreciable lack of respectfulness in her tone and bearing. Yet her impassiveness had its galling effect in some way. I felt it myself, and Rosetta no less.

"I'll go," Rosetta repeated, angrily. "And at once."

"And where to, may I ask?"

"That matters not; only let me go."

"To your husband's house, of course. Overbury Hall is, without doubt, the proper place, the only place, for Lady Overbury to return to. Where else could she go?"

Rosetta hesitated. Then she tossed her head and stamped her foot impatiently. There was silence for a few moments. "Let it be so," she said at length. "I'll go back to the Hall."

"It will be best, I think, if your ladyship really feels well enough to undertake the journey. His lordship must be already anxious on your ladyship's account. But I can send to the Hall to let him know that you are here in safety, if your ladyship will honour us by remaining here until the morning."

"No, I'll go back; at once," Rosetta said, peevishly. She was nearly crying, I think. "Perhaps you can send some one to point out the best and nearest way. I'll not trouble you to do more than that." She was losing her grand manner.

"It is no question of trouble. I'll go with you myself," said my mother, promptly. And she rang a bell which communicated with the stables.

"Mother," I cried, "let me go. It is not fit for you to venture out. The night is very bitter." But with calm decision she put me from her.

"Your uncle is not here at this moment, or it would be for him to see her ladyship safely to the Hall. In his absence it is my duty to undertake the task. Kem, tell Truckle to get the covered cart ready and to harness the old chestnut; he's very sure-footed, and will take us by the down track well enough if Truckle leads him. There is no fear. I know every step of the way. I have been out in

worse weather than this—and Truckle and the chestnut too.”

Kem departed on her errand. My mother took down a large lantern from a high shelf above the dresser, and lighted it. Then she equipped herself in a heavy cloak of scarlet cloth with a close hood to it, that hung behind the kitchen door. She was soon ready for the journey.

Rosetta sank down again by the kitchen fire, and listlessly kicked the fender as she gazed into the glowing coals. Her face wore the pouting expression of a vexed child. She had played out her part. She looked more herself—the Rosetta of my love. There was silence for some minutes, broken only by the loud ticking of the old Dutch clock, the occasional crackling and rustling of the coals in the grate, the light silvery sound of falling cinders, and the jarring of Rosetta’s foot kicking against the iron fender.

To me there was something dreamlike about the whole scene. I could not yet fully believe that it was all real and true. Rosetta—the tight-rope dancer—my Rosetta—Lady Overbury! And seated in front of our kitchen fire! My mother, standing apart, cloaked and carrying a lantern, ready to see her ladyship safe back to the Hall. And I, leaning

against the dresser, looking on, bewildered, helpless, dumb. It was all most strange.

Soon Kem returned to say that the covered cart was ready and waiting at the farm-yard gate. It could not be drawn nearer to the house because of the snow. Rosetta rose. I approached to assist her in resuming her fur-trimmed mantle, but my mother was beforehand with me. She saw herself to the due wrapping-up of her ladyship for her night's trip across the down. Again I was compelled to be a mere useless bystander, forbidden to take active part in the scene.

Rosetta was herself once more. She turned upon me a most radiant smile.

"Good-bye, Duke, and thank you. I shall never forget this day." She stretched forth her hand to me. I pressed it, timidly and awkwardly, I fear. I had not a word to say. I went out with them to the farm-yard gate.

Rosetta, declining my aid, sprang lightly into the high cart.

"It reminds me of mounting to the rope," she whispered, with a musical laugh.

My mother drew me on one side.

"You will remain at home, Duke. Promise me." I promised, for she spoke urgently, although,

in truth, I had intended to follow the cart. "Your uncle will be back soon. I cannot think what has detained him so late," she went on. "You will tell him that I have gone out, and explain the errand I am bound on. I hope to be back before very long. Assure him that there is no danger. Tell him that I have taken Truckle with me, and the old chestnut. Kem will see to his supper. Keep up good fires."

The cart moved off slowly, with a heavy muffled sound as the wheels forced their way along the heavy choked path.

"Good-bye, Duke," cried Rosetta, merrily.

What an exquisite voice it was! She laughed again, and I thought I saw her hand waving adieu to me. She seemed like a child enjoying its first ride. Was this acting still? I felt how little her strange mirth would commend her to my mother's favour.

For some time I stood, leaning against the farm-yard gate, watching the departing cart as it jogged and struggled on its uneven way, looking jet black upon the field of dead white it traversed, the lantern my mother carried within casting in front a circle of dim orange light upon the snow. I could hear the creaking of the springs and the jolting of the

wheels, long after I had failed to discern the figure of old Truckle at the chestnut's head and the form of the high hood of the cart. It was quite out of sight at last, hidden by the shoulder of the down. Yet still I stood listening to the dull sounds of its uneasy progress. I almost longed to hear cries for assistance—for I knew the snow was very deep just outside Purrington—that I might hasten forward, released from my promise, and see Rosetta once again.

Yet what madness it was! What could she ever be to me? Was she not lost to me for ever? There was shame and sin in even thinking of her. She was Lord Overbury's wife. The night was bitterly cold. I returned to the house, and sat down in Rosetta's chair beside the fire, moody and vexed, and despondent enough. I had never felt so wretched.

"And to think of her being a real lady," said Kem, "and sitting avore the fire in my kitchen, warming herself just as you or I might do, Master Duke. There, it quite mazes me, it does. A pretty creature she was, too; I'll say that for her, though not in her ways like the quality folks quite, to my thinking. She'd a temper of her own. She'd no need that I could see to fall out with the

missus. But she was quite in a miff, all on a sudden. Lady Overbury! Why his lordship must be terrible old for so young a wife! What were they stones called she wore in her ears, Master Duke, dost know? Not glass, surely, though 'um looked summut like it."

"Diamonds, I suppose, Kem."

"Dimants, was they? I've heerd tell of dimants, but I dunno as I ever set eyes on um avore. They was main bright, to be sure, and glittered so you'd think they was avire; but they wasn't so much for size. That there pebble I wears o' Sundays in my tucker is a sight bigger. Reube gave it I. I didn't care to take un, but he said he'd chuck un in sheep-pond if I didn't. 'Twas a fairing he bought at Dripford, so a' said." She laughed, and then returned to the subject of Rosetta. "Where did she come from, Master Duke, hast heerd tell?"

To this question I made no reply.

"Not from these parts, I reckon," continued Kem. "She'd something of London about her talk, I'm thinking. Not but what she spoke pretty, too, avore she fell rusty with the missus; and then she was main rudderish. 'I'm Lady Overbury,' she ses, getting up, terrible huffed. And to think of her being lost in the snow! Out in plantation, wasn't

she, Master Duke ? How come she there, I wonder ? His lordship ought to take better heed on's wife. Strange, I never heerd on's marrying. But gentlefolks has queer ways. There's no telling what they'll do, and what they'll let alone. And his lordship's allays been a queer quist, so folks allays says hereabout. Well, a's got a young wife, and a sprack un, too. There's no saying how 'twill turn out. 'Tis like shovelling coals on a dull fire. There may be a blaze, and there may be a smother. Red-haired girls is mostly fractious I've been told. I mind my father could ne'er abide a ginger hackle, as a' called un. But I dunno ; I thought her ladyship main pretty, and her hair a wonder for quantity. Not that it's for me to be judging of such things and spying about my betters. But they dimants was a real sight to look on. And rings on her fingers she had, and a gold chain round her throat ; and for lace and silk, there, I never did see a prettier show ; and for the like of she to be out lost in plantation this weather, and night coming on ! 'Twas like to be her death. Why I mind once years ago——" and Kem, so far as I noted what she was saying, wandered into a protracted narrative of how Jim Truckle's aunt, or it might have been his great aunt, had remained fixed in a snow-drift in Bul-

borough meadows for three whole days during one very severe winter, within sight of her own cottage. She was released at last, it appeared, much more dead than alive, by a neighbour approaching her by chance in his search after a strayed pig. As I gathered, the lady was a scold, and her husband had not stirred himself much to search for his missing partner. Her sufferings, it was suggested, had a beneficial effect upon her subsequent conduct as a wife.

"Her wore a red cloak," said Kem, "and there her was, unable to move hand or foot, all but froar to death, and yet her could see her own kitchen chimney all the while. Poor soul, for sure she suffered terrible."

My sympathies did not attend this story very closely. I remember I was cruel enough to ponder over a certain picturesque character suggested by it, and mentally to paint the scene with an impressive juxtaposition and contrast of the dazzling white snow-drift and the poor old woman's scarlet cloak.

"Here's the master," said Kem, suddenly.

My uncle's footfall was heard without. He entered the kitchen. Briefly I informed him of all that had happened.

"Gone to the Hall! Gone to the Hall! Such a

night as this! With Lady Overbury! Lady Overbury? It can't be, surely!"

I could only repeat my news. He had great difficulty apparently in comprehending me.

"Truckle's with her, you say?" He seemed more at ease on learning this. "You're sure? Well, well, we can but wait a bit. But if they're not back soon, Duke, we must go out and look for them. For Lady Overbury—I don't understand it. But your mother will explain all when she returns. I'm sorry I wasn't in when all this happened. But we've had a deal of trouble down in the meadows."

It was my uncle's way to let one subject engross him to the hindrance of all others. He could rarely distribute his contemplations. Just now the trouble in the meadows possessed him. So he put from him for the time my news, and spoke solely of an accident that had happened to one of his oxen (a broken limb it was feared, due to a fall upon some rotten ice), discussing as to what was best to be done, and as to whether the butcher should be sent for, or the cow-doctor of our district.

"One of my finest oxen, worth twenty pound at least. The weather's cruel bad for the cattle. There's not a farm hereabout that won't suffer for it this time. A wonderfully fine ox; the best I had;

one of those red Devons I bought last year, you remember."

It was some time before he could relinquish this topic and take up with another. But presently I noticed an abstracted look upon his face, and heard him muttering, "Lady Overbury! Lady Overbury, indeed!" again and again. But he did not address me on the subject. He sat staring into the fire, drying his boots, and tapping his snuff-box. He was now occupied, however, with my mother's mission, and was plainly perplexed about it, and anxious for her return. Every now and then he turned in his chair to look at the clock. Meantime Kem placed his supper before him. He was wet and soiled with his labours, and, as was usual with him in such case, preferred to remain in the kitchen, rather than move to the parlour.

Every ten minutes I went out to gaze in the direction of Purrington, in hopes of seeing the returning cart. There was no sign of life or movement in the drear white landscape. Sometimes I followed the track for a hundred yards or so, listening for the sound of the wheels ploughing through the snow. But I could hear nothing; all was very still. There was no wind, and the sky had lost the frosty clearness it had worn of late. It seemed as

though there might be a heavier fall of snow before morning. It was less cold, I thought; or I was heated by my feverish fears and 'hopes. So some hours passed. Even my uncle, though he said little, grew uneasy and anxious, I noted.

At length I walked out towards the higher down, and discovered—a star? No, it was moving: the dim gleam of the lantern my mother carried, swayed about by the rocking of the cart. It seemed but a spark in the distance. Now it grew brighter. The cart was returning in safety. I hastened to meet it.

The old chestnut was nearly dead beat. He moved along very slowly in a dense cloud of steam. Still the veteran toiled on gallantly. Truckle was much exhausted, and his temper had suffered.

“A nation hard job,” he said. “Drattle the snow!”

“Is all well, mother?”

“All’s well, Duke, thank God!” she answered, cheerily. But as I helped her down on the cart’s arrival at the farm, I found she could scarcely stand, she was so stiff from the cold. She was agitated; but her eyes were very bright. “Mind, Truckle, and give the old horse a good feed of corn. He’s done bravely. It’s been a hard night’s work for all

of us. And you'll come into the kitchen presently, Truckle, and have your supper and a mug of strong beer. You've well deserved it."

"You left her ladyship?" I asked.

"Yes, we saw her ladyship, as you call her, safely home."

"As I call her, mother? Is she not her ladyship, then?"

She was about to speak abruptly, almost angrily, I thought, but she checked herself.

"Well, well, let it be so. Call her what she calls herself — 'Her ladyship.' What does it matter?"

"But she offered you proof of her right to that title."

"I declined to see it. It was nothing to me."

"But you, yourself, addressed her as Lady Overbury."

"And you addressed her as Rosetta."

"I knew her by no other name."

"You knew her? You had met her before, then? Where? When?"

I briefly explained. I had seen her first in the booth at the fair; and not again until I had found her in the plantation.

"At a booth in the fair? An actress?"

"A rope-dancer."

"I might have been sure of it."

We were now at the kitchen door. My uncle
came out to meet us.

"Well, Mildred," he said, "what's all this been
about?"

"Presently, Hugh, presently."

"Thank God! you're home again in safety.

What a night for you to be out in! Come and warm
yourself at the fire. No, not a word now. You
can tell me all by-and-by."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOOTSTEPS IN THE SNOW.

I WAS leaving them.

"You're not going out again, surely, Duke," said my mother.

"I promised to meet Reube at the fold, the last thing at night. I'd almost forgotten it. He'll be waiting for me."

"I'd forgotten about Reuben, too," observed my uncle. "I've been in such a caddle down in the meadows about those oxen. One of them pretty nigh killed, I fear, Mildred; the finest Devon. Twenty pounds out of my pocket, and more. But there's no help for it, I suppose."

"Must he go, Hugh? Such a night as it is?"

But my uncle did not observe her appealing tone and looks.

"See if he wants any more straw, Duke. You'd better tell Truckle to take half a load down to-

morrow morning in any case. Reube must have all he wants. These poor sheep are well nigh perished with the cold. But tell him to be careful. I've no more straw than I know what to do with. And I don't want to be buying any with prices what they are."

"Must he go, Hugh?" my mother repeated.

"Well, I'd go myself; but I'm fairly tired out. It won't take him long, and it will cheer up Reube, perhaps, to see some one. There's no danger, Mildred. Still, if you're set upon his not going——"

My mother withdrew her opposition.

So I went out. It was part of my practical education as a farmer.

I found Reube without difficulty. He was just leaving the fold to go home for an hour or two's rest. He seemed quite worn out with fatigue and anxiety. Yes, he wanted more and more straw. Things were "desperd bad." Still Reube thought we'd got through the worst of it, and that the cold was "giving" a bit. He'd made up the fold pretty comfortable; the sheep couldn't harm much for awhile; they were "howed for." And the wind had gone down. Well, he didn't mind if he did have just a toothful of brandy. How it warmed a

a man! Why, 'twould bring un back to life though a' were "stwon dead." Good night, Reube! Good night, Master Duke! And I was alone.

I determined to carry into execution a wild project I had conceived. I would go to Overbury Hall; visit once again the Dark Tower!

It was absolute folly, as I knew. I had but the vaguest end in view. I did not hope to see Rosetta. I scarcely even wished to see her. It seemed to me unpardonable presumption to think of such a thing. But to be near her—to see the roof that sheltered her; her home, as I must now consider it—I promised myself contentment if I could achieve so much, or so little.

Beyond this I had determined nothing. But I was restless and troubled, and I felt that this wild journey through the snow to Overbury, that movement of any kind, was preferable to returning home and vainly seeking sleep. I knew that there was no repose for me that night.

I convinced myself that I must go, let the toil or even the danger—although that I derided—be what it might. The thing appeared to me absolutely imperative. How irrational and absurd all this was, I need not say.

The night would have been dark but for the

snow. The wide-spread field of white reflected and multiplied greatly all the light there was. I found the track without difficulty. I could even trace the wheel-ruts dug by the covered cart going and returning. All was very silent. The striking of the church clock had something unusually solemn about it, gaining volume in the prevailing stillness, and finding strange echoes over the down. The village lay before me, a dark cloud. Not a light burned in any of the cottage windows.

No sound save a startling crackle of the ice in the sheep-pond as I neared its edge, and crisp whisperings of the snow-drifts here and there, and the noise of my own steps as I crunched along.

I was now at the park palings; now groping my way through the dark tortuous avenue that led to the Hall. It was a ghostly sort of mission I was bound on. Memories of my long-past juvenile journeys to the Dark Tower, and the fancies and trepidations thence ensuing, crowded upon me. What a child I was still! My heart beat strongly and rapidly. I was tempted to wish I had never set forth. Surely it had been better to have stayed at home! I went on, however; but abashed somewhat, and with declining courage.

I emerged from the dusky avenue, and, with a

start I could not control, found myself close upon Overbury Hall.

Greatly to my amazement, I perceived that a light was burning in one of the rooms upon the ground floor. It was the room in which I had first seen the satyr.

Cautiously I advanced towards it, the snow muffling the sound of my footsteps, and, as I had done years before, I mounted to the window-sill, and peered in.

For some moments I could distinguish nothing, the panes were so coated with the mist of frozen breath and the steam of the warmth within. Then I made out that a fire was glowing in the grate, a lamp was alight on the table, and that two persons occupied the room—Lord Overbury and Rosetta! I could scarcely restrain a scream of surprise.

A sofa was drawn in front of the fire. Lord Overbury was reclining, asleep apparently, with a coloured silk handkerchief half covering his face. Rosetta occupied a low stool close by; her head, leaning back, rested upon his shoulder; her profuse hair hung down loosely, and one of his dark hands seemed entangled in its coils, as though he had been toying with her tresses when sleep had overcome him. Her eyes were open; she was

contemplating the fire with a calm, contented expression. The burning coals awoke quivering reflections in her face, touched with radiance the jewels she wore, and rimmed with red light the folds of her light silken dress. She was perfectly happy, as I judged. It was a scene of domestic comfort: husband and wife! If there had been enmity between them it was over now. Peace reigned again; they were thoroughly reconciled. Yet what a pair they were!

There was a look of home comfort about the room, due perhaps to its small dimensions, and to its crimson fire, for it was still but scantily and shabbily furnished. Decanters of wine stood upon the table, and I could even perceive his lordship's large gold snuff-box resting within reach of his hand.

For some time I remained gazing at this strange picture, as though fascinated by it. Yet it distressed and pained me acutely. An unreasonable anger and jealousy possessed me. That Rosetta could be no more to me—was lost to me for ever—I could, as I thought, endure without repining. But that she should thus, after all she had said, accept her fate—almost, as it seemed, proud of it, rejoicing in it—this was hard to bear. For how

could I pity her now? My love I had been content to yield, since there was no help for it, to lock within my own heart, and subdue and stifle as best I could. For it was plain my love was a folly and a sin. But my right to pity—I had clung to that—must I abandon that also?

Rosetta's head turned. Her eyes were moved from the fire to the window. But mechanically; for though she seemed to be now looking at me fixedly, I felt sure that she could not really see me. Suddenly she started, however, disengaged her husband's hand from her hair, gently, so as not to disturb his sleep, stood erect, and moved towards the window. She had seen me!

I stepped down hurriedly from the window, noiselessly retraced my steps, and hid myself in the dark shadows of the avenue. I was ashamed of having come, of what I had seen. I wished to escape unrecognised. My heart seemed on fire. I wished never to see her, never to hear her speak again.

She opened the window slowly and gently, and looked out. "Duke, Duke!" she called, softly. Then she murmured, "How cold! What a night!" Then she cried, "Duke, Duke!"

go to her? It was torture to turn a

deaf ear to her voice. Yet I was in the mood to find a sort of pleasure in torture, self-inflicted. I held my peace, and remained motionless in the avenue.

"I'm sure I saw him," she continued, in a subdued, musing, musical tone. "I could not have been dreaming. Duke! my Duke! Yes, and there are footsteps in the snow!"

She left the window and then promptly returned to it, holding the lamp high above her head. How beautiful she was! So I thought, even in my bitter vexation and anguish, Hero must have looked when awaiting Leander, and raising a beacon flame to light him on his way to her across the Hellespont. But I answered not.

She called to me again; then I heard from within his lordship's voice, loud, angry, swearing at the cold and the draught. She closed the window abruptly, and all was still. I turned homeward.

There was a mist over the down, floating in white wreaths. The air was damp. Reube had been weather-wise. The cold had given; a thaw had come. The snow was melting; and with it my love.

It still lived, but it was grievously hurt. In

part I had crushed it by my own efforts; in part it had been stricken by another, and by circumstances. How long could it survive? It had yet vitality enough to perplex and wound me sorely.

I passed rapidly by the village. I was soon on the open down. Then I suddenly discovered that, absorbed by my bitter reflections, I had wandered from the track. I was plunging through untrodden snow. All was white mist before me. I could define no objects far or near that might be to me as landmarks. If I could but see a hayrick or a dungheap, I should be probably able to tell to what part of the down I had wandered.

I thought of Kem's story told me over the fire but a few hours back, though it seemed months since. "Lost in the snow. Buried in a deep drift—within sight of home!" Yet I assured myself that I ran no greater peril than that of being a wanderer on the bleak down until morning broke. I was satisfied I had not deviated very far from the track. If the mist would but lift a little! A stumble; then a sudden plunge. I was up to my waist in snow; only to extricate myself with great difficulty.

I had been walking some time, as I knew by hearing the church clock strike again. It was

behind me; it afforded me no further clue to my whereabouts. I should be near home now as a mere question of time, and the ground I had travelled over. I was terribly fatigued. I felt that I must in any case keep moving on, wakeful and watchful. But it was trying work.

There were dark objects before me, and I could hear a murmuring, rustling, gently swaying sound. I was among trees! The boughs were dropping snow upon me. A moment to reflect. Yes, I was in Orme's Plantation; there were no other firs near. I stood where I had seen Rosetta in the afternoon. Here I clasped her fainting in my arms. Here she had fallen in the snow. How much had happened since! I must find the track even though I went on my knees and groped for it with my hands.

"Thank God!"

It was found at length, and slowly and laboriously I followed it, very careful not to quit it again, and presently I stood looking down upon the hollow in which was reared the farm-house. The mist was now less dense than upon the higher land—had floated over it apparently. There was a light burning dimly in the kitchen window. Steadily I made my way towards it.

The door was on the latch. It was often left so all the night through. We had no fear of intruders or marauders; and robberies were events almost unheard of in our district. I entered. The fire was still alight, though sinking fast into dull, red ashes. I threw myself upon the hearth. I was thoroughly exhausted.

“Duke!” cried a voice.

Was I dreaming? Was Rosetta’s cry from the window of the Dark Tower still sounding in my ears?

“Duke!”



CHAPTER XXIV.

CHANGE.

My mother stood in the doorway.

"Duke! my boy! Thank Heaven you're safe home again! I could not sleep for thinking of you. But how late you are! You are not ill? You're sure?"

"No, only very tired, mother," I answered, faintly. "I missed the track somehow, and had trouble to find it again."

"You went beyond the fold?" She came to me at the fireside.

"Yes, beyond the fold, some distance," I said, with hesitation.

"My boy, how cold your hands are, and how you tremble."

I could see that her dark eyes were bent upon me, and that there was an expression of anxious inquiry upon her face. Yet she forebore to ques-

tion me further. At a word from her I should, I think, have told her all: my love and my folly, and my bitter mortification. Perhaps she already divined all this; or, suspecting it, shrank from having her fears confirmed by direct confession of mine. It was enough for her at that time to know that I was worn out with fatigue, and suffering cruelly.

She was very gentle with me, as though constraining herself to be calm, that in such wise her presence might impart to me some feeling of repose; that I might be soothed, as it were, by contact with her tranquillity. She sat down beside me in front of the fading fire; her arms were about my neck; she smoothed away my dry crumpled hair, and tenderly pressed her cool palms upon my burning forehead. She chafed my chilled hands in hers; my head rested upon her shoulder, and she gently swayed to and fro, rocking me to rest as years before she had lulled me to sleep, a tiny child upon her bosom. To her I was a child still. I was little more to myself. I was so helpless, weak, wretched.

It was upon her kindly arm I leant as I tottered up-stairs to my room; my limbs yielding under me, my strength gone, my heart terribly oppressed. Still she had not questioned me. Rosetta's name

had not again been mentioned between us. At the sound of it I knew I should have broken down completely. The mere thought of her brought tears to my eyes, in my state of exhaustion and miserable despondency. Did my mother note all this? She affected to know nothing of it.

With all my weariness I slept but ill, disturbed by fearful dreams. I was haunted by visions of grievous calamity and death in frozen regions. All I had read in times past of forlorn adventures upon arctic voyages came back to me, assuming vivid form and substance, and blending curiously with the occurrences of the last few hours. I could see ships wrecked upon icebergs, and groups of gaunt famished men preying upon each other in their desperate need, perishing of cold and hunger, dropping dead one by one so rapidly that I could never correctly reckon the number of the living. There were wretched tents and hovels, constructed out of the fragments of dismantled ships, and throngs of muffled Esquimaux, and sledges with jingling bells, and packs of starved wolf-like dogs that glared wickedly upon me with their flaming eyes, as they licked their rapacious jaws. Yet the scene was somehow strangely like our down between the farmhouse and Overbury Hall! And I could plainly

see Rosetta wearing my mother's scarlet cloak, a brilliant speck of colour in all that waste of universal white, waving her shapely arms despairingly, beckoning, crying to me for help, as she stood upon a block of floating ice, borne far from me upon a rapidly flowing stream of sea in the direction of some hideous beast of prey, crouching upon a ragged promontory of rock, and prepared to spring upon her when she had been carried sufficiently near. And this creature was Lord Overbury! He was miles away, yet through the bleak transparent air I could plainly discern his satyr face, and the satyr form that now he wore. There was savage glee in his eyes, and his yellow teeth were bared with a grin of triumph. She cried to me, but I was powerless to assist her, for I was tossing in a deep snow-drift, sinking deeper and deeper as I struggled to extricate myself, the cold striking to my very bones, deadening every limb. I could not save her; I was myself perishing. The snow was rising above my head, was suffocating me. I could but cry to her in a choked, agonised voice, "Rosetta! Rosetta!"

And then, I was awake. It was broad daylight. The gleams of a wintry sun were feebly filtering through the steam-clouded panes, and painting pale

yellow patches upon the walls of my room. And there was the dripping sound of the snow melting from the eaves and the window-sill. The thaw had really come.

My mother stood by my bedside.

I sought to rise, but my strength had gone; my limbs were stiff and swollen. I had been seized with rheumatic fever. It was thought advisable to send over to Steepleborough for Doctor Turton. I had no power, even if I had inclination—and I had not—to oppose this step being taken. The doctor was in attendance upon me forthwith.

Then followed many weary weeks of close confinement, of shattered health, of acute suffering. But my physical infirmity had this good effect; it hindered my mind from morbid dwelling upon its troubles. I was powerless to think or to remember. My weakness drove me to apathy. All seemed vague and dreamlike about me. I relinquished of necessity effort of every kind. I was content to lie torpid, mindless, half dead. I was at times delirious, I learnt afterwards, but I remained throughout unconscious, or nearly so, of mental anguish.

Doctor Turton was a frequent visitor, and did not spare his skill or painstaking. At all hands,

indeed, I was the subject of most tend
tude. My mother's devotion to me
bounds.

The fiercer pains of my malady abated,
upon a state of languid and indolent conva
slowly, very slowly gaining strength and
towards health. A certain listlessness, an
both of mind and body, clung to me some
the doctor had ceased to attend me, except
tently, when chance brought him in the ne
hood of the farm-house. I was myself
that I had undergone a change; that I
energy and fervour; that I no longer vi
world about me as formerly I did. Yet
from satisfied that this alteration was
amendment.

At an early stage of my recovery, I h
tioned Kem as to her news of the grea
Were Lord and Lady Overbury still ther
they had departed long since, immediately
breaking up of the frost; they had gone n
whither, and had never since returned. I
no talk of their return. I asked no further
on this head. I sought, indeed, out of we
much as indifference, to put the past away
me, as something done with so far as I

cerned—an account closed for ever in the ledger of my life.

It was genial weather now ; the trees richly decked with blossoms ; the soft air scented with the sweet breath of spring flowers, and melodious with the chorusing of birds ; the fields bright green with the young corn ; the lush meadows alive with frolicking lambs. The farm was thriving ; its future seemed full of hope and promise ; my uncle was thoroughly content ; Reube, laborious as ever, was not dissatisfied ; his flock could compare favourably with the flocks of neighbouring farms. His pains and trials had not been unavailing ; his lambs were perhaps more “ forrard ” than could have been expected.

Harmony prevailed ; yet in my heart were discordant notes. I seemed for the time to have lost all power of sympathy. I was not self-engrossed, however. I was indifferent to my own fate as to that of others. I was careless what might happen ; my life had lost object and hope. In the affairs of the farm I no longer affected to concern myself. I was excused from active exertion on the score of my infirm health. I took advantage of this pretext for inertness, long after it had ceased to have warrant in fact.

"The young squire goes lopping about with a's hands in's pockets," I overheard Reube say on one occasion; "there, I can't bide for to zee un. Why don't a' take to pitching hurdles or zummat. 'Twould do he all the good in the world. 'Taint no manner of use doing nothing but stare about 'un gaping at sheep and never axing a question as to how's um getting on. But 'tis no business of mine, I suppose."

I wrote no more verses; such small poetic faculty as I had ever possessed seemed to have departed. Some few random studies in my sketch-book, feeble and incomplete enough, were the only efforts that varied the monotony of my months of convalescent lethargy.

I became conscious that I was the subject of frequent consideration to my mother and my uncle. Although they did not question me I felt that they observed me narrowly. Often I found my sudden entrance disturbed their conversation. They ceased abruptly, and pretended to occupy themselves with indifferent matters. I knew that I had been the subject of their speech. I judged also that they differed in opinion concerning me.

I discovered, moreover, that counsel had been sought of Doctor Turton, and that he had, after

much hesitation, recommended "change." It was as a new, almost an empirical medicine in our part of the country. The prescription was viewed with much misgiving, it was so entirely out of the ordinary course. As a rule, our practitioner plied his invalids with physic until they recovered or expired. For change of air or of scene, such a remedy seemed vain and extravagant. What air could be more satisfactory, people asked, than the air that blew so freshly over our plain? Who could desire change of scene that had our panorama of open country stretched out expansively before him? The doctor diffidently expressed an opinion that, for certain constitutions, reduced by illness to a delicate condition, the air of our downs might possibly, for awhile, be found too bleak. Change of scene, he admitted, stood in his mind, in relation to the present case, as representing increase and variety of mental occupation, which, he said, would possibly be more advantageously secured at a distance from the home of the patient. In short, he held, though he did not openly avow as much, that there were times when it was as expedient to slacken leading strings as to unwrap bandages, in order that greater liberty of action might be secured, and nature permitted a chance of remedying herself.

My uncle found an opportunity of private converse with me. He spoke with some embarrassment and hesitation. He was generally ill at ease, indeed, upon such occasions, for words did not come very readily to him. His manner was not unkind, yet it conveyed a sense of disappointment.

"You're weary of the farm, Duke," he said, "and you don't take to farming. That's pretty plain, anyways. I don't blame you for it, my lad. I'd have had it otherwise if I could; but I can't, it seems. There's no help for these things. I'm fond of the farm myself. I've grown to it, and it's grown to me, till somehow it seems to be part of my life, and that I couldn't get on without it—nor it without me. That's but fancy, perhaps; for I must go some day, when God pleases, and the land will be left to be tilled by another, and to thrive fairly in his hands, likely enough. I'd thought it might some day come to you to do this, Duke, rather than a stranger. The land's been held by the Ormes, father and son, for many a long year now. I've lived single, as you know; wife and children have been for others, but not for me. You've been to me as a son always, Duke; that's how I've thought of you, though perhaps I've never said as much before, for it's not my way to talk of what's in

my heart. I never could give tongue to my thoughts, somehow, without seeming to spoil them, and feeling shame at doing them injustice. But, as I said, you don't take to the farm, so all that's over now."

I murmured that I was sorry; but I could not question that he had truly stated the case. He nodded his head. He was not looking at me as he spoke; we were leaning over the farm-yard gate, and he was raking the straw with his walking-stick, hardly conscious, I think, of what he did. His voice had been somewhat tremulous; and he was plainly discomposed, perhaps by the unwonted task of speaking so continuously.

"Still, you know, Duke," he continued, "it does not do to be idle. We're in the world to work, or to be of some use to those about us, I suppose. It's time you were doing something towards earning your own living; if not on the Down Farm, why, then, somewhere else. Heaven knows I don't wish you to leave us, still less does your mother, poor soul. It will try her hard to part with you, I need not say. But she feels as I do about this thing. She didn't at first, perhaps; 'twas hardly to be expected of her; but she does now. She was never one to spare herself, or to think of herself when there was right to be done or the good of others to

be cared for. She'd have said all this to you herself, and she'd have said it far better than I can say it, but her heart was very full, and I'm glad to spare her what trouble I can. She's had her full share of troubles already. Poor Mildred! So we've been thinking, Duke—I'm making but a bungling story of it, but this is what it comes to—that you'd better quit home for a while, and look about you a bit, and see to winning your own bread by your own labour, in a way that may seem pleasanter to you than staying here idle and weary and moping about the farm. I'm not fault-finding, Duke. But I can't but see that things are as I've said. Your home isn't to you now what it was once. Leave it awhile, then; likely enough it will take its old shape once more again when you've left it behind you. It isn't really changed. And come back to it when you may, my boy, please God, you'll find it standing still, and your mother, knitting or what not by the fireside—I'll not speak of myself—only too pleased and proud to welcome you back again, and make much of you, and love you still. She'll never cease to do that, I think, and I wouldn't have her cease, let you go where you may or do what you will."

He paused for a moment. There was a tear

trickling down his weather-beaten cheek. But he took no heed of it.

"I'd almost forgotten what more I had to say," he went on, presently. "But we've seen that you're given to books and learning. You've had advantages in that way such as I never had, or other folks hereabout, and it might be well you should turn them to account. So we thought of your going up to London."

My heart gave a great leap of surprise and joy as he said this, and I could not but echo his words, "To London!"

"Yes, it's a long way off, I know, and we had thought at first of Steepleborough, as being nearer. But old Mr. Paunceby isn't the man he was, people say; though I give him credit for getting those poachers convicted at the last assizes; he managed that cleverly enough. Besides, his office is full. He couldn't take another clerk, it seems, though we wanted him to, and he wanted to ever so. So I've been turning over in my mind about an old friend I had in London long years ago—James Monck his name is. He was reckoned a very clever lawyer then, and he's a younger man than myself. He was bidding fair to rise in his calling, and I don't doubt he's done so. Well, I wrote to him as to taking

you as his apprentice, or what they call articled clerk, and I've had an answer."

He took a letter from his pocket, and studied it through his double glasses.

"Lawyers are formal people, and this isn't his handwriting—some clerk's work, I suppose—but it's his signature, I'm pretty sure, though it's more shaky and straggling than he used to write. He was busy, I dare say (London lawyers generally are), or he'd have written me a more friendly kind of letter. But that's of little moment. He's not forgotten me it seems. And he states here very precisely the terms upon which he would receive you into his office. They're heavy, and the charge for stamps, &c., seems high. But James Monck would only do what was fair and right, and I don't complain of his charges. I can afford to pay them, and more if need be. The question is, will this suit you, Duke? If I've done wrong I've done it for the best, with a hope of serving you, my boy. There's no need for hurry as to answering. Take time to think it over. You're fond of books. Well, here's a calling—a profession, as they say—which seems to me pretty near all books. You can't read too much or know too much for a lawyer. Can you give your mind to it, Duke? Can you be

happy—for that's what we want you to be—happy as a lawyer? Will it suit you better than farming?"

My uncle quitted me; he declined to hear my answer then. But my mind was already decided. I would quit the farm, journey up to London, and become a lawyer. A new world was opening to me, a new life. I thrilled at the thought. My listlessness and languor fell from me; I was stirring and alert once more.

CHAPTER XXV.

GOOD-BYE TO THE FARM.

MY elation at the thought of quitting the Down Farm was perhaps, all things considered, natural enough; and certainly I took little pains to disguise my sentiments upon the subject. But I feel now that I overlooked too completely the disappointment of my uncle, the distress of my mother, and that in their eyes my joy at departing must have seemed cruel and ungrateful. I was selfishly absorbed by my own plans, and hopes, and prospects. My gaze was fixed upon London and the future. I could not bestow a glance upon the home I was abandoning. I had no thought for those I was leaving behind me, for the feeling of loss and loneliness my absence from my accustomed place by their fireside would surely occasion them. But youth ever rushes on forward; age clings to the

past. I was intent on the new career that was opening and stretching out before me. They were occupied in musing over the long departed days when I had first been brought, as a child, to the farm-house; the years I had since spent beneath its roof-tree; the cares they had lavished upon me—cares that yet were as coins that purchased pleasures—until now, when, with a sort of cold-hearted alacrity, I was quitting them, to return—when?—they scarcely dared to hope or reckon—or to return changed, blemished by contact with the world, maimed, perchance, in its ever-raging strife; no longer their boy, but another. It was very hard for them to bear. Still they had persuaded themselves that it was their duty to let me go; that it must be so. They took courage, strove to suppress their grief, even laboured to share in my hopefulness.

“So you’ve made your choice, I hear, Duke,” said my mother, gently. “May it prove to be for the best! God bless you, my boy.”

She spoke no word of reproach or repining, but there was eloquence of this kind in her looks, had I possessed but sense or sympathy enough to heed them. There must have been something painful to her in the contrast of my flushed cheeks and joy-

excited eyes with her own jaded face, pale lips, and tear-glazed glance.

My setting forth could not be so immediate as I desired. Deliberation and delay seemed unavoidable.

Many letters had to be exchanged between my uncle and the London solicitor, Mr. James Monck. A draft of my articles, written in the same clear, formal hand-writing as his letters, arrived at the farm-house for perusal and approval. My uncle gravely conned it through his glasses, labouring to master the significance of the document, but perplexed, I think, by its strange terms and involved phraseology. He decided at length that it was correct and satisfactory enough, or it would not otherwise have been submitted to him by his old friend—though he had seen nothing of him for so many years—Mr. Monck. I, too, studied the paper curiously, without, however, very fully comprehending it.

Then great preparations had to be made. In those days a journey to London, with a view to residence there for a considerable period, was a serious undertaking. I had to be provided with an outfit, as though proceeding to some distant colony, and to visit in turn the tailor, hatter, and haber-

dasher of Steepleborough. My mother was much busied over my wardrobe, mending old garments and carefully marking new ones, in the hope of frustrating the fraudulent arts of London laundresses, whom she held in severe distrust. My proposed departure was viewed as a most important event in the neighbourhood. It was some time before people could be induced to credit that it was a matter of absolute fact. The thing was almost without precedent in Purrington. "To London!" farmer Jobling had been heard to say. "Well, neighbour Orme be taking his pigs to a pretty market—going to make a London lawyer of that boy of Mrs. Nightingale's, so folks tell me. There, they'd better by half take and send un to Botany Bay at once; 'twill save trouble in the end." Yet I remember, when I called upon the farmer to say good-bye to him—I made a series of visits to our small number of friends and neighbours with this object—I found him very hearty and kindly indeed. He plied me with his oldest and strongest ale until I tingled all over, my eyes grew dim, and my brain dizzy; and he withdrew me out of hearing of Dame Jobling, as he wrung my hand with distressing cordiality, and hoarsely whispered, "Bless'ee, my lad; luck go with ye. And hark'ee; that London's

a terrible wild place. I was there myself for two days thirty years gone, and it nearly drove me mad. And young chaps can't hardly keep out of mischief there; 't isn't perhaps to be expected of 'em, with such nation strange doings going on all round 'em. Well, look'ee, my lad; if you get into trouble there, that money can get you out of, and you wouldn't have the old folks know about—as it isn't fit, perhaps, they should know everything—you send a line to me—d'ye see?—and I'll help you; you see if I don't. Trust old Jobling, and he'll see you safe, never mind what the sum may be. I say what I mean, for certain sure, Master Duke; 'tis my way. So bear it in mind, my lad. And bless'ee again; and, as I said, luck go with ye." He accompanied this speech with a variety of nods, and winks, and nudges in the side; and, indeed, I think was already so impressed with a sense of the wickedness and temptations of London, or possibly with a suspicion, almost amounting to certainty, of my capacity for error, that he desired then and there to empty his pockets for my benefit, that I might be duly prepared for the vague "trouble" he was confident I should get into sooner or later.

I met nothing but kindly sympathy on all sides; with genuine expressions of regret at my departure.

I felt that I had done little indeed to merit these. But Purrington was in earnest as to all matters of a "neighbourly" kind. It was thought strange and wonderful that I should elect to quit the district. I was regarded rather as a strayed ox or sheep, which it behoved men to rescue from danger, and see safely bestowed—for what was another's case to-day might be their own to-morrow. But since my resolution was fixed there was nothing for it but to wish me God-speed on my way: an element of admiration at my courage blending with surprise and regret that I should be, as all judged, so headstrong and mistaken.

There were many private consultations in my regard between my mother and my uncle, continued far into the night, long after I had retired to rest; for early hours were urged upon me in consideration of my recent illness. But I did not sleep very well, or court my pillow very earnestly. I was too much occupied with preparations for my journey; arranging my little stock of books and drawings, studying the straps and fastenings of my new portmanteau, folding and unfolding my store of clothes. Of certain results of the nightly deliberations in the parlour I was duly informed, however. I was to reach London by the early coach that passed

through Dripford from the west. I was to remain for the night at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, the destination of the coach. In the morning I was to present myself at the office of Mr. Monck, in Golden Square, who would be duly advised of my coming. Further arrangements as to my securing lodgings in London were to be postponed until after I had seen Mr. Monck, and obtained his advice upon the subject. I was to be supplied with a monthly allowance, that seemed to me of a liberal amount enough. I was to write constantly, and I was assured that any suggestions I might make as to my future comfort should be promptly and attentively considered.

My uncle had originally designed to accompany me to town. But he was not loth, I think, to change this plan. He was still suffering from rheumatism, and he was reluctant to quit the farm. It could ill spare him, he said, then or at any other time. Somehow things had a way of going wrong if he but turned his eyes away from them but for half a moment. And he was anxious about sickness in the stables—one or two farm horses were in a bad way. Altogether, he thought, if I could spare him, he'd rather stay at home.

I took kindly leave of all my friends among

the farm servants. They were very hearty with their "Bless'ee, Maester Duke! Moind and coom back zafe and zound to we!" And they all viewed London distrustfully, as "a main caddling place, from all they'd heard tell about un." Reube, carefully wiping his fingers upon his smock-frock as a preliminary, gripped my hand hard, and gave me a large clasp-knife, by way of memento of him, cautioning me that the biggest blade was "nation shairp"—he'd bled a sheep with it only that morning. From Truckle I received a dozen plover's eggs, and a curiously shaped stone, said to be a thunder-bolt, he had found upon the down.

Kem presented me with a red silk pin-cushion, fashioned by herself into the form of a heart, almost as big as a bullock's. It was moist with her tears, to the danger of rusting the pins, when I received it. With the gift came numberless resonant kisses.

I began to feel, with all my eagerness to quit it, that the Down Farm was very dear to me.

It was but just daybreak. The time had come for me to turn my face towards London. I was to be driven over to Dripford by Truckle in a light cart.

My mother was 'up to make breakfast for me.

She had not slept, I'm sure, throughout the night. I could eat nothing.

My uncle drew me on one side.

"I'd many things to say to you, Duke ; at least I thought I had. But somehow they've gone out of my mind, now. It doesn't matter much, perhaps. All I'd say but comes to this. Don't forget the Farm House. Don't ever bring discredit upon it. But you won't, I'm sure. Be steady ; and careful of yourself. Think always of your mother. I'll not speak of myself ; think only of her. You're very dear to her ; almost all she's got to care for now in the world. Her hopes and prayers will ever go with you, my lad. You'll not forget that. Believe that she's always beside you. It may help and shield you, perhaps, to think that, when temptation comes to you, or trial, or trouble—they come to every man in turn, and they'll come to you, my lad, do what you may to avoid 'em. But be true to her, and to yourself ; be brave and honest always, and, please God, you'll come safe through. And write to her—not to me but to her—it will so cheer her poor ailing heart to hear from you. The postman that brings news of you will be her best friend henceforward. Write to her, whenever you get a chance, and tell her all ;

hide nothing from her; she can't hear too often from you, or know too much of your doings, and she'll never love you less, do what you may. She'd tell you this herself, but I can see, poor thing, her heart's too full, and she'd break down altogether if she tried to say a kind word. But she means all I've said, and more. She's loved you always, and always will. God bless you, Duke. I'd more to say, but I can't hit on the right words just now. Only this. Here's a pocket-book—a little present. There's money inside, not much, but it should last you some while, and a letter." He paused for a moment, checking his emotion; there were tears in his eyes, and his voice had been much broken. But he continued in a firmer tone. "A letter; never heed the name on it now. It's addressed to—to a person in London—a sort of relative. You've never seen him, nor he you. But it's right, perhaps, that going to town, you should find him out; not presently, but by-and-by, when opportunity comes. I've talked the matter over with your mother, and that's the conclusion we've come to. You understand. And so—God bless you. You'd better be starting soon. I doubt if our clocks are quite Dripford time, and you musn't miss the coach."

My mother scarcely trusted herself to speak.

In this way she retained her self-command, and to all outward seeming was calm and composed enough. I noted that her hand did not tremble as she poured wine into my flask, and packed up for me such refreshments as she judged I should need upon the journey. She was mindful of everything to the last. But her fond eyes followed me unceasingly. And I observed that she found pleasure in allowing her touch to rest upon me, in smoothing my collar or fastening a button of my coat, or tying a scarf round my neck. Her fingers lingered yet, long after these little offices had been accomplished. In such-wise she seemed to assure herself of my presence, and to postpone as long as possible our separation. She had strained me to her heart, and kissed me tenderly, bidding me God-speed, yet still, even after I was seated in the cart, she was holding me fast by the hand, the while she saw to the proper disposal of my luggage and wraps, and instructed old Truckle to be heedful how he went. She yielded, however, on my uncle's gently touching her hand, and stepped back to let the cart pass on its way.

“God bless you!” they all cried.

As I looked back I could for some time discern the figures standing at the farm-yard gate, my

mother and my uncle, and Kem, with her apron raised to her eyes.

High upon the down towards the Dripford road, I observed Reube, in the far distance, up to his knees in cabbages, pitching hurdles as usual. He waved his hat, and I could hear the dim murmur of his far-away shout. I shouted back, in turn waving my hat.


So I quitted my home and made for London.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LONDON.

It was pleasant enough to be sitting on the top of the bright yellow-painted Defiance coach, bowling along to London as fast as four horses could hurry us. Pleasant to rattle through a stone-paved town, and win admiring glances from its denizens; our appearance was so splendid, our pace so rapid, our air altogether so triumphant and jocund; and then our destination was London! Could they think of that and not applaud us, even though something of envy might mingle with their homage? It was pleasant to wind along the white roads, climbing open breezy hillsides, careering over high down lands, and then to descend suddenly down into shady and secluded valleys where nestled cheery villages with trim parsonages and grey, ivy-patched church towers; to listen to the soft murmuring music of running streams, and the bright firm notes of the

blacksmith's anvil; to dash past the cosy roadside inns agleam with polished tankards and chequered doorposts, and crimson window curtains: chamber-maids smiling from the garret casements above, and jocose ostlers gesticulating merrily at the horse-trough below; to overtake vehicles of less pretence and importance, the gigs of commercial travellers, the slow-going coaches of county families even, drawn up to the hedge sides, their near wheels almost sunk in the ditches, waiving their dignity for awhile to allow of proper space for our passing them, the loaded carts of farmers, the heavy-hooded waggons of carriers. And now we were scaring a drove of full-uddered cows; now cutting our way through a flock of bewildered bleating sheep, amid the barking of angry dogs, and the cries of startled shepherds, until we seemed buried to our axle-trees in a fleecy sea. We had left our thin-soiled, chalky, pale green country far behind, and had reached more bountiful districts, the land rich and marly, with high hedge-rows, luxuriant woods, and abundant water. Houses now drew nearer together; the homesteads wore a wealthier look; the corn-stacks were of vaster size, and more numerous; churches hemmed in by grey headstones and daisy-sprinkled green mounds, seemed to abound; on all



sides the landscape was enriched by the signs of more liberal culture and denser population. We were miles and miles from Purrington Down. And ever accompanying our progress sounded the music of the jingling harness, the harmonious beating of iron-shod hoofs upon the firm road, and the "clicking" of the coachman as he produced the mystic inarticulate utterances which urge horses on to increased exertion.

Pleasant all this, and yet after awhile I wearied of it. Time was permitted me to grow sad, to feel the uncertainty of the future, to be infected by the sorrow of those I had left behind me. In my haste and eagerness for the journey townwards, I had suppressed every other thought. Now reflection awoke within me. I was disturbed by the ever-changing scene I was hurrying through. It was all somewhat too new and strange to me. I longed for rest. Often as I passed some swinging gate, opening on to ploughed uplands or wooded pasture through which a rush-fringed brook serpentine and rustled, how I wished I could alight, and rest, and ponder but for a little over the happy peaceful life I had abandoned, the new stirring world to which I was hastening!

And I grew cramped with sitting still so long

on the hard, narrow ledge behind the coach-box. I felt chilled, and my feet became numbed, although the sun was shining and the genial breath of summer was in the air. How eager we all were to descend to stretch our limbs, and stamp upon the ground when another stage was completed and we paused for a minute or two to change horses! "Now, William, look sharp," was always the coachman's cry, as he studied certain mysterious papers he carried in his hat, presumably relating to the parcels and passengers he was charged to deliver at particular stations upon the journey. Meanwhile there were the many inscriptions upon the coach for us to read, the list of important towns (including Dripford, I noted) through which it passed, with "Defiance" emblazoned in gold letters upon the door of the hinder boot, and the magical word "London" in large letters upon the side panels. That had something exhilarating about it certainly.

It was a relief, too, almost in the nature of an excitement, when, at a special point in our journey, a new coachman took possession of the whip and reins. The duties of our first driver, it appeared, had terminated; he had seen us safely half-way upon our road. He received donations from us on this account, I remember, with an affability and

readiness which yet were largely leavened with dignity. I began to think that stage-coachmen were by far the most important personages I had yet encountered in my experience of the world. Their box-seat was as the throne of an absolute monarchy. They were peremptory with ostlers and the indescribable underlings invariably attached to stables, as though they were something in the nature of gaitered human fungi; rather sharp with the guard; benign to landladies; almost wickedly arch in their attentions to barmaids and in recognising the glances of housemaids seen for a moment at upper windows, bed-making possibly, as we rattled past; but gracious and communicative in a grand way to passengers in the neighbourhood of the box-seat. They freely imparted information concerning the parks and country seats we approached and left behind; and had concise tales to tell now of this, now of that landed magnate, knowing well their political sentiments respectively, their views as to the preservation of game, the amount of their income, the acreage of their properties, and how far these were encumbered, and generally discussing, with charming frankness, their merits and demerits. Did they rehearse all this kind of agreeable talk day after day, like players playing parts, to a new

group of auditors? Probably; yet they manifested no sign of weariness, were always alert and bright, seemed indeed to enjoy the sound of their own voices, and the familiar subjects of their speech. And they had much to relate to inquirers concerning the cattle they drove, and had a dainty way, as they spoke, of applying the lash to some chosen spot on the flank of the particular horse under mention, intent on hitting the precise mark, and no other, quite to a hair's breadth, and invariably succeeding, as it seemed; there was something of the subtle art of fly-fishing, it struck me, about this operation. There was little difference except in the matter of dress between our two coachmen. Both were middle-aged, portly, rubicund, with iron-grey whiskers and curvilinear, parenthetic legs, as though in youth they had ridden the horses they were now promoted to drive. Both wore scarlet geraniums in their button-holes, stout tan-coloured gloves, and tight-fitting drab cord trousers; and both smoked full-flavoured cigars. But the first coachman boasted a white beaver hat, a checked cravat, and a bottle-green coat with flat brass buttons; the second wore a low-crowned, broad-brimmed black hat, almost of an ecclesiastical pattern, a blue silk neckerchief peppered with white spots, and a mul-

berry coat adorned with bright basket buttons. Each sat upon an amazing pile of great-coats and wraps until he towered above us all, as though ruling us, like some ancient chieftain elected to sovereignty by his tribe, on the score of his superior stature. "Going through, sir?" asked the second coachman of each of us in turn on assuming his lofty station, as indeed his predecessor had previously inquired when we first came under his control. This question satisfactorily met, the second coachman took up the theme of discourse much where the first had quitted it, and proved himself not less informed or less willing to impart his information.

With a strange thrill I perceived a growing, congealing cloud in the east towards our front, and knew that London was near at last! And as I gazed my heart bounded, for there came a sudden rift in the swarthy canopy of smoke, and I caught a dim glimpse of the massive blue-grey outline of St. Paul's. There was a certain grandeur and solemn significance, I thought, in this ceaseless shroud of dense vapour overhanging and robing the city of the world. It had its picturesque value too; for I noted that the sun, now sunk behind us, had tinged with ruddy hues the wreathing haze, lending it transparency, and relieving its monotone of

sombreness. Already the dusk of night was drawing over, outlines were becoming blurred and obscure, the air seemed thickening and darkening. Yet in the mist brooding over London could be seen opaline lights and flashes, contrasting, here and there, streaks of vivid tint with rolling masses of impenetrable shadow.

Soon after entering upon our last stage for changing horses (Hounslow, I think), it seemed to me that the Defiance lost its glory, ceased to be an object of interest to any one, became but a commonplace and every-day sort of thing. We were gradually being merged and lost in the immensity of London. We joined a stream of other vehicles, and our individuality and importance departed from us. None came out now to view us, to greet, to admire. We passed on unobserved, unvalued. The roads were now paved, and we jolted painfully along, keeping our seats with difficulty. The coachman grew silent; he could scarcely hear or make himself heard for the general confusion and tumult. The very horses drooped, slackening their speed, leaning against each other as for support, reckless of appearances. Depression and weariness afflicted us all, and a feeling, I think, of responsibility amounting almost to awe. It was our own doing;


but we had sought the giant London, only to be devoured and swallowed alive.

It was quite dark when the *Defiance* drew up at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross. The passengers alighted one by one, and went their several ways. I never saw one of them again. I entered the coffee-room, and ordered dinner and a bed for the night. The Golden Cross was an old-world commercial inn in those days, with a quadrangular stable-yard, and offices, hemmed in by galleried buildings. The air was close and dusty, and seemed to have been carefully bottled in the inn, until it had gained much in point of body and bouquet. My bedroom had the smell of a cupboard that had remained unopened for a generation. A sort of musty fluffiness pervaded it. A massive four-post bedstead, heavily curtained and festooned, had taken possession of it, consuming its air and space. It appeared to be ventilated solely by means of the key-hole, and that was half choked with rust and flue. Still I was only to occupy it for a night. My first in London.

It was vexatious to hear myself described by a pimpled waiter, wearing very down-at-heel pumps, in a hoarse but audible whisper to a sallow ringleted lady, who sat in the bar before a large book, almost as though she were reading the lessons in church,

as a "regular yokel." I was not the better treated by the Golden Cross on that account. And unfortunately it was true. I was, and knew myself to be, a "regular yokel."

I stood at the inn door waiting for dinner, conscious, by comparison with the passers-by, that I bore a pronounced rural look, that my clothes were not of London form, that my boot-soles were unduly thick, that my speech had a country accent. The lamps were lighted, the streets were crowded, the noise I thought something prodigious. It was all very dream-like. Whither was all this endless procession of people wending? They hurried past me without sparing me a glance, in adroitly interweaving lines proceeding to and fro, careful not to jostle or molest each other, bent upon mysterious missions and purposes, a secret to all but themselves. It was very strange to me to see so many faces, and not one that I knew—to hear so many voices, and yet all unfamiliar to me in every tone and inflection. How far away I was from Purring-ton! I was a stranger suddenly landed alone upon a foreign country. I could not but feel a sense of solitude and desertion creeping over me, perplexing and saddening me. I was so lonely, so young, so completely inexperienced. Yet I was braced by a



certain adventurous spirit, cheered by a sentiment of enthusiasm. Life and the world were to be no longer closed books to me. At least my hands were on their clasps and fastenings, and I meant to open them with firm fingers and a stout heart. That was my view of the situation—especially after I had dined.

END OF VOL. I.



